

Enterprise —



Log

Entries 69

a STAR TREK
fanzine

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ScoIpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 69.

We are sorry about the price increase in this issue; this is due to an increase in printing costs - in fact, we were caught on 68, but because it had already been advertised at £3.00, we felt we had to absorb the extra cost.

It was nice to have so many favourable comments from people at Enterprise One about our new look. Zine production seems to be a constant battle between quality and cost - we try to keep a reasonable balance. Much of the credit must go to Janet, for the work she puts in preparing the masters.

This issue sees the conclusion of Janice Pitkethley's 'Son of Vulcan' series; these stories and Ann Humphrey's delightful illos have proved very popular with those of you who enjoy stories of the characters as children.

As this is the last zine we're putting out before Christmas we have a rather special seasonal story for you by Ginna LaCroix; we hope you enjoy it as much as we did, and we'd like to thank Ginna for sending it to us.

Our next issue of Log Entries is not due now until Spring. Our printer is moving to new premises, and we may experience slight delays until things are more settled.

The Jennifer Gutteridge stories are being typed up now. We are not sure yet whether we will have two volumes or three, but they should be ready for U.F.P. con next year.

We hope you all enjoy this issue and we would like to take this opportunity to wish you all the best for Christmas and the New Year.

Valerie

As always, comments, criticisms and especially contributions are always welcome.

Our stated policy is for series-based action adventure stories featuring the Enterprise and her crew. These are, after all, 'The voyages of the starship Enterprise...'

Contributions can be sent to either

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THE MAKING OF A STARSHIP



Somewhere in the vast
cold unforgiving galaxy,
taking up
perhaps only the
equivalent of a
speck
lies
the making of a Starship.
As yet without a name,
even now
she sits there
bathing in her own
form of majestic glory.
And now she has a name,
"THE U.S.S. ENTERPRISE",
and
some day she will
own
a Captain
to benefit her true
worth.

Sheena Ann Brown
and
Joyce Devlin





THE TANGLED WEB



by

Elaine Sheard

The corridor was long and brightly lit though the light showed nothing to indicate its location or purpose. Yet to the shorter of the two men walking its length there was really no difficulty in guessing where it led. James T. Kirk, Captain of the Starship Enterprise, had been to several such places as he followed his career.

It was the smell that told the story; even though this was a Federation planet it was still there, that prison smell, faint but unmistakable.

Well, at least I know where I am, thought the Captain wryly, *but I would still like to know why.* He looked at his companion, almost fearing to see some expression, but there was none. Yet James Kirk knew that face very well, well enough even to read this lack of expression.

He was here at the request of his Science Officer and friend, Spock, in the hope that something could dispel the feeling of helplessness he had had for the last few months, ever since the news of the disappearance of the Vulcan ship *Vistal* between the planets *Domian* and *Vulcan* - the ship on which Spock's parents had been travelling.

They came to a door flanked by two guards, both built on generous lines and armed with phaser rifles. One of the guards moved his rifle almost casually from arm to arm and said,

"You have some identification, gentlemen?"

Without a word Spock produced his security pass, and Kirk, forewarned about this at least, did the same. These passes, giving instant access to any Federation top security installation, were examined with great care, as were their owners, and when the guard spoke again it was in an almost suspicious tone.

"I must do a weapons scan before you can go any further," and waiting only for a brief nod from the Captain he produced the necessary equipment from his belt and carried out the test.

"The Governor is expecting you."

This came as no real surprise to James Kirk, who supposed few people came this far without being expected. The guard touched his belt once more and the door behind him slid open almost silently. Beyond it was another shorter corridor down which the guard walked, followed by the two Federation officers. He knocked on a door at the end of the corridor and entered the room beyond.

"The officers you were expecting, sir," he said as he laid the

passes, which he had kept, on a desk inside the room, and motioned the two men inside.

The Governor was a man in early middle age. He was of average height, yet gave an impression of toughness and intelligence. "Thank you, Mr. Smyth," he said in a deep voice, and as the guard left the room he turned to the visitors. He studied them closely for some moments, then indicated two chairs and asked them to sit down. He tapped a letter in front of him and spoke brusquely.

"I have received a request to co-operate with you from an impeccable source, a source I hold in great respect - as indeed I do Starfleet and its officers. However," he went on, and his voice became firm and insistent, "my first concern is for the safety of the prisoners under my care. This isn't an interrogation centre, and will not be used as one. Whatever my personal opinion of the pirates - and believe me, gentlemen, I have one - they will be given their full rights under Federation law."

Spock, who had been sitting in his chair stiffly, almost at attention, replied, "I have reason to think that one of your prisoners can give me some information on a personal matter. However, no coercion will be used, I can assure you, Governor."

The Governor looked at him almost sadly. "Forgive me, Commander, but can you be sure of that? Am I not correct in believing that members of your family were among the passengers on the Uistal?"

Spock leaned forward slightly, but his tone was as expressionless as ever. "Both my parents were on the Uistal."

The Governor then looked not at the Vulcan but at the Human at his side. "Captain, when I received notice of your visit I took the liberty of making enquiries about you and Mr. Spock. Frankly, I don't think even a full Vulcan could guarantee his behaviour in the presence of someone responsible for his parents' disappearance and probable death."

James Kirk looked at his friend and then at the Governor, and his voice was firm and sure as he answered. "Sir, I have known Mr. Spock as a colleague and friend for many years. If he gives an undertaking he will keep it, come what may, not as a Vulcan nor as a Human, but as one whose word is inviolate." He rubbed the side of his face slowly and then went on, "For myself, if Mr. Spock asked it, I'd stand still in front of Genghis Khan. At least, I'd try."

The Governor thought for a moment. "Quite a testimonial, Captain. Very well, if the prisoner is agreeable you may both see him alone for fifteen minutes; but I must warn you that the security cameras will be on at all times. That's regulations. However, I shall watch the film myself and the tape will be released only under strict security conditions. Now, which of these pirates do you want to see? Though I must tell you that I cannot make him see you if he doesn't so wish."

"The man's name is Philip Johnson," answered Spock in his even voice.

"Oh yes, the quiet one. Said to be a ladies' man. You are sure he was in contact with your family, Commander? There were a lot of people captured by these pirates one way and another."

"Yes," Spock answered. "The interrogation tapes clearly indicate a connection."

The Governor gave the Vulcan an intense look. "Neither I nor any of my colleagues have had access to those tapes, Commander. A Starfleet privilege, perhaps?"

"I think not, Governor," the Vulcan replied evenly.

There was a short silence, then the Governor went on, "Well, with all your connections, Mr. Spock, perhaps you will have something to induce truthful answers to your questions. There isn't a great deal you can offer a man who is almost certainly facing the death penalty in the next few weeks, but I take it you have the financial and personal backing to make such an offer if necessary?"

The Vulcan didn't answer, and it was Captain Kirk who spoke.

"Yes, Governor; anything that is permissible." And he thought to himself, *Anything we can stomach.*

"Very well," said the Governor. "I shall be about ten minutes." And he left the room.

There was silence for a time, then James Kirk got quickly to his feet and began to pace the room. Most of the crew of the Enterprise would have recognised that walk - his 'thinking walk', they called it. After some minutes the Captain stopped by his First Officer.

"Spock," he said after a long look at his companion, "Spock, do you really think this is such a good idea? What good can it do? It's going to be... well, unpleasant, to say the least."

The Vulcan turned slightly to look at his Captain. "I think it is necessary, Jim. Every avenue must be explored in this matter, however slim the chance of further information being forthcoming."

"Yes, I suppose so, but why didn't you tell me where we were going and what was going on?"

The Vulcan looked at him, then answered slowly, "I was asked not to speak of this to anyone. You came this far at my request. You did say you wished to help in any way you could, and I took you at your word."

"Yes, of course." Kirk paused a moment. "Tell me, Spock. This Johnson fellow - what was his job? What precisely did he do for these pirates?"

"I am told he was owner and pilot of one of the attack ships, Captain. I understand that my mother became his property after one such attack."

The Human looked away for a moment and then swore fervently, but when no response came from his companion he sank into his chair again and remained there until the Governor returned.

"Well, Captain, Commander," he said, all formality, "the prisoner has agreed to see you. He informs me he will try to answer your questions if you will arrange for Lawyer Telson, a man much given to passionate pleas, to represent one of his fellow accused."

"Which one?" asked the Captain in surprise. "I would have

thought the verdict's a foregone conclusion."

"Possibly this one has a chance of a different verdict," the Governor answered. "He is only just of age. Anyway, those are the terms. Well, Commander?"

"If this lawyer is available I shall certainly undertake to engage him," Spock replied.

"Very well, gentlemen," the Governor said briskly. "Then please follow me."

Without waiting for a reply he led them out of the door down yet another long featureless corridor to a forcefield at the end. After this had been deactivated he approached what was obviously a cell door. He released the security lock and opened the door.

"In here, gentlemen." And he entered the room followed by the two Starfleet officers.

Inside the cell there was a table, two chairs and a bunk, all fastened to the floor, all pretty much standard issue for this kind of place. Captain Kirk took this in at a glance, then looked carefully at the occupant. He could only be described as ordinary, the kind of person you could pass anywhere and not really notice. He was of average height with light brown hair, brown eyes and an unremarkable face. His undistinguished appearance came as a shock under the circumstances.

The Governor was speaking as Captain Kirk made his appraisal. "These are the officers who wished to speak to you, Johnson. Commander Spock has agreed to your terms, and would now like to ask you some questions."

"Very well, Governor," the prisoner replied. His voice was as unremarkable as the rest of him, his Federation Standard almost without accent.

The Governor turned to the two officers. "You have fifteen minutes, no more." As they nodded their assent he turned and left the cell.

The three men stood in silence for some minutes, then Spock spoke in the same controlled tone he habitually used.

"Ambassador Sarek and his wife are my parents. They were both passengers on the Vistal. You had some contact with them, I understand, after the disappearance of that ship?"

The prisoner looked for the first time at the Vulcan and answered slowly in an almost disinterested voice.

"The Ambassador I had little contact with. He was housed with the other male Vulcans in the most secure area. Since Vulcans are known to refuse to pay ransom we had taken very few before the Vistal was captured. That was after Kalba, one of the Klingon pilots, had found an outlet for Vulcans, though he never would say where. He cornered the market, you might say. He shipped them out twenty at a time. Your father was in the second lot, I believe."

Spock made no comment, and after a while the prisoner continued, "Your mother is a courageous woman, Commander."

Spock's expression changed very slightly. Enough, however, to tell his Captain at least that he found this compliment to his mother worse than what had gone before.

The prisoner was speaking again, seemingly on a different track. "The Vulcan women had this habit of committing suicide if... er... pressed too hard. They even took their children on the same route, so it was decided to keep the children separate. While the children lived, so did their mothers."

"My god!" Captain Kirk's expletive following this outburst was worse than the one he used before.

"Jim, please," said his Vulcan companion, and as the Captain turned away he said to the prisoner, "Pray continue."

"She had been a teacher, I think, your mother. Anyway, she took care of the children. There were some Humans waiting to be ransomed, and also some Vulcans whose mothers were co-operating with us. The people for whom the women worked paid for the childrens' care."

"Paid who?" asked Captain Kirk, joining in the conversation once more.

"Oh, me," said the almost indifferent young man, for he was no more than thirty. "The Ambassador and his wife..." Then he stopped for a moment, as though afraid.

The Vulcan, his voice as expressionless as ever, prompted him by saying, "The Ambassador and his wife were your personal property, I understand."

"Not at first. I won them, together with a Vulcan woman and two children, in a game of cards."

At these words Captain Kirk stepped forward and came close to the author of this brutal statement, his anger apparent in his every movement. The prisoner reacted by throwing up his arms as though to ward off a blow. The back of one of his hands touched the Captain's clenched fist as he did so. At this touch the Captain pulled back as though burned, and with a low, "Sorry, Spock," to his friend he walked over to the wall and put his head against it for a moment.

"I share your distaste, Jim," the Vulcan replied, and his breathing was harsh for a few seconds. "What happened to change this state of affairs?" And his voice was as even as ever.

Having begun his tale the prisoner began to talk more easily. "It was Kalba. He was having difficulty getting together a third lot of Vulcans. They had to be in twenties, for some reason. He decided to take women, even children, two for one adult. I didn't like it, I assure you. T'Vellma was safe with me - I like women and children - but I was outvoted. Your mother insisted on going with them; I couldn't talk her out of it, so I let her go. The ship on which they travelled never got to the slave market on Hipsing, that I do know."

The Vulcan, whose calm had almost deserted him, said, "However, I assume you received adequate compensation for the loss of your assets, whatever your personal feelings might be."

The prisoner did not deny this, but tried to justify his actions. "I was just a smuggler at first, and no drugs either, but one thing led to another. It could have happened to anyone."

A fleeting look of distaste passed over the Vulcan's face, then it took on a look of carved stone. "You delude yourself," he said, and his voice was calm again. "The fifteen minutes are up," he continued. He touched his Captain's sleeve for a moment and, with timing as impeccable as ever, moved towards the door just as it opened from the outside.

The Governor said very little as he escorted the two officers from the prison. His courteous farewells were received with as little comment as good manners allowed.

Kirk and Spock walked slowly away from the building, and neither spoke until they reached the small spaceport, where the Enterprise had its transporter coordinates set.

"I appreciate both your presence and restraint in this matter," Spock said.

"I'm glad you see it that way," his Captain answered, somewhat embarrassed.

There was silence for a moment, then Spock spoke again. "I have some arrangements to make, Captain. With your permission, I would like 24 hours leave to complete them."

The Captain did not reply immediately, but looked at his chronometer, and then directly at his First Officer for the first time since leaving the prison.

"No, Spock. I want you back on board by midnight. That should give you more than enough time for whatever you have to do."

The Vulcan did not reply, but raised his eyebrows in that familiar manner.

The Captain went on, "I don't want you wandering around this miserable planet on your own. Anyway, your help will be required for some crew training I have in mind."

"This is one of the few occasions I have asked for leave, Captain. I would appreciate your agreeing to my request."

"Another time, perhaps. I want you back on board by midnight, and I will make it an order if necessary."

"Very well, sir. I will, of course, obey your order, although you are being somewhat emotional in your reasoning. I can assure you that your concern is both unnecessary and unwarranted."

"You have your orders, Commander," was his Captain's only reply before he turned and walked without hesitation through the entrance hall in which they had been standing and out of sight.

The Vulcan looked after him for some seconds and then he too turned and walked with his usual firm step away from the spaceport.

Ensign Costa was bored. This, his sixth consecutive night of transporter duty, was as monotonous as the previous five. The planet was an unprepossessing place, not a desirable planet on which to take leave. The trial of the pirates taking place there had, if anything, made things worse. The population was relieved that the

disappearance of ships in their sector of space had stopped, but were waiting until the trials were over and the pirates dealt with before they would feel able to relax.

Mr. Costa was expecting the First Officer to beam up, but this activity was not welcome as his long stint as night transporter operator was due to a punishment detail of Mr. Spock's. He could have refused to accept this and appealed to the Captain, but he preferred the First Officer's somewhat stringent punishment to having the Captain mention the incident on his record. The Ensign had expressed his appreciation of a female yeoman's attributes in a manner appropriate to his Italian forebears. Despite the Captain's own liking for female company the fact that the yeoman had been on duty and had reacted in a very vocal manner would, he knew, weigh heavily against him. On the whole he considered he had been let off fairly lightly.

He looked at the transporter clock. If Mr. Spock, who was certainly aware of the unwritten rule of reporting for transportation five minutes early, was making some Vulcan point by being exactly on time, he wanted no part of it. Yet the Captain had given him a message for Spock, one he knew he would have to deliver.

There was the First Officer now, 30 seconds before midnight. *If only,* thought the Ensign, *I didn't have to speak to him!*

"Mr. Spock," said the Ensign as soon as the Vulcan had materialised, "Captain Kirk asked that you report to his cabin immediately you came aboard, sir."

"Indeed. Thank you, Ensign," said Spock, and walked out of the room.

Mr. Costa breathed a sigh of relief. *That's one interview I wouldn't like to attend,* he thought.

The Captain was in his cabin reading one of his antique books, but he was obviously not at ease. At last his door buzzer sounded and he put down his book with an audible sigh.

"Come!" he said quickly, and he looked up eagerly as the tall figure entered the cabin.

The First Officer stood at attention and spoke in his most controlled voice. "Commander Spock reporting for duty as ordered, sir."

The Captain ignored the tone. "Never mind that," he said impatiently. "Come over here and look at this." While speaking he picked up a piece of paper from his desk and held it out. His voice was so eager, so intense, that Spock, after raising an eyebrow, dropped his official stance, walked forwards, took the proffered paper and read it.

The paper seemed to hold some particular fascination for the Vulcan because he did something almost unprecedented. After reaching the bottom he proceeded to re-read it. His expression changed just for a moment, but when he spoke his face and manner were normal.

"This seems to be the precise details of the launch of what is almost certainly a survival capsule. May I ask where you acquired

it?"

The Captain answered slowly, "That fellow Johnson, when he seemed to think I was going to hit him, passed it to me. I was so surprised I just took it."

"Out of sight of the security camera, I take it. Interesting."

"Yes - that's why I couldn't say anything down there. As this is the area where that Klingon ship disappeared, it appears he's trying to help us, and if for some reason he wants it kept quiet I think we should go along with him."

"I agree, Captain. I do, however, find the delay in receiving this information somewhat hard to accept. I must assume there is an adequate reason."

There was a short silence, then Captain Kirk said in a completely different tone, "Mr. Spock, I've been thinking. Since we have to remain in this sector, though our services won't be needed until after the trial, we could use the time for a training cruise."

Spock looked at his Captain and raised an eyebrow, but his voice was quite expressionless as he replied, "I concur, Captain. Training is always useful."

"I am glad you agree, Commander. What I thought was that we should have a complete search and rescue exercise, say in this area." He pointed to the map he had projected on his viewscreen.

"Yes, Jim, I think that area is ideal." The Vulcan's expression softened just for a moment.

His friend looked away, then said quickly, "Three Class M planets, Spock. That can't be bad."

"No, Captain. That would raise the odds of a successful landing considerably." There was a short silence. "I owe you an apology for my earlier attitude."

The Captain smiled. "Your 'attitude', as you call it, was quite justified. I just wanted to get you on board as quickly as possible. Anyway, it'll look as though I'm pulling rank on you. I've already told the port authorities we're leaving at 06.00 hours."

"Indeed," said the Vulcan.

"Well, Commander, I am sure there are matters awaiting your attention."

"I can assure you, Captain," Spock said blandly, "that all the departments under my jurisdiction are invariably fully employed. However, there is always room for improvement. If you will excuse me, sir?"

"Of course, Spock - and good luck." Kirk waited for further comment from his First Officer, but for once there was none. He just raised an eyebrow and left.

The auxilliary bridge, although only used in emergencies, was by necessity always manned. This duty was more popular than might have

been supposed as it gave an excellent opportunity for private research. Ensign Roberts was a case in point, for as a theoretical mathematician he found his time there very useful. He had reached a conclusion to his present work, and at a much earlier date than he had expected. However, as his mathematics professor had told him, even the most theoretical work had a habit of leading to more practical aspects. His contact with a junior Ensign's work had made him think this might be one of those times.

Two years ago Ensign Roberts had been a Lieutenant on another ship. He had found it necessary to prevent his First Officer from harming a native of a first-contact planet. That the First Officer had been medically discharged from the service because of the incident hadn't prevented Mr. Roberts from being demoted and losing two years seniority. He accepted this philosophically, being glad he wasn't also permanently grounded. He was extremely happy to have been assigned to the Enterprise, even if it did mean his being somewhat older than the other Ensigns.

For the last few weeks he had been taking Mr. Spock's advanced maths class while the Vulcan was busy. Here he had got to know the charming Ensign Rosemary Layton. She was not pretty by conventional standards, but Mr. Roberts found her more attractive each time he saw her. His regret that their relationship remained that of teacher and pupil was, he hoped, well hidden. He had first taken an interest in her research as a way of spending more time with her. However, her work in the field of communication anomalies seemed to complement his to a surprising degree. He had, therefore, suggested that they combine their research. He just hoped he could maintain his professional attitude.

At the end of his shift Lt. De Mar came in smiling. Previously a year junior to Mr. Roberts, he seemed rather to enjoy his present authority over the older man.

"Well, Mr. Roberts," he said, "I see you haven't updated the status of the equipment yet. Duty comes before private research, you know." Without waiting for a reply he leaned over and wiped the computer tapes in the viewer.

If he expected a reaction he was disappointed, for the Ensign merely replied,

"Yes, sir. Have I your permission to re-do my research in the next shift - after completing all other work, of course?"

"Very well," said the Lieutenant somewhat sullenly, but the other man paid no attention to this. After appearing calm in Rosemary Layton's presence, Lt. De Mar was no real trouble.

The atmosphere on the bridge was tense. The search and rescue exercise had been going on for three days now. The Captain was getting edgy, the First Officer had hardly left the bridge, and the results were nil. Mr. Chekov spoke somewhat reluctantly.

"Latest scan completed, sir. We are still unable to obtain full sensor readings because of atmospheric conditions. Those we have obtained are negative."

His Captain was unsympathetic. "Come on, Mr. Chekov," he said. "There could be a whole spaceship down there for all you know. There

must be ~~some~~ kind of reading. I want to hear it - and soon."

The First Officer checked the readings on his scanner, then said in his usual precise way, "There are fluctuations, sir. Mr. Chekov is correct - no useful readings are available at this time."

Dr. McCoy, who had been on the bridge for the last hour, spoke quietly to Captain Kirk. "Come on, Jim, they're doing their best. Why don't you give everybody a break and leave them to it for a while?"

The Captain hesitated for a moment, then he smiled suddenly. "Okay, Bones. Let's both go and get a cup of coffee."

"That's more like it," said the Doctor, pleased.

"Mr. Spock, you have the con," said the Captain, and after hearing an acknowledgement left the bridge.

"What's with you and Spock, anyway?" the Doctor asked as they walked to the mess. "You both act like you were looking for the Federation President instead of taking part in an exercise."

"The Captain replied, "Well, you know Spock. He likes things done properly - and come to that, so do I."

"Oh yes," observed the Doctor sceptically, "and I suppose that's why you've been acting like a bear with a sore head for the last few days. Come on, Jim - what gives? It's a funny sort of exercise when both the Captain and the First Officer supervise every minute of it. You know the crew wouldn't be so uptight if you'd leave the bridge occasionally and let them get on with it."

"It hasn't been all that obvious, has it?" his friend asked ruefully.

"It sure has," the Doctor answered firmly as the two men sat down. The Doctor thrust a cup of coffee into the Captain's hands. "Here, Jim," he said. "Drink this, and don't try to tell me how routine all this is, because I just wouldn't believe you."

Mr. Roberts, who had been sitting nearby eating a quick lunch, couldn't help overhearing the last part of the conversation. He finished eating and sat back to try and reach a decision. His collaboration with the delectable Rosemary was very promising, at least as far as their research was concerned. Normally they wouldn't have approached the Science Officer until a much later stage. However, after what he had just heard he didn't think they had much choice. He had a good idea how his record looked to any Vulcan, with their great respect for authority and their dislike of violence. Still, Mr. Spock *had* let him take his maths class, so he would have to take the risk.

The First Officer was in his cabin for the first time in four days. He was only there at his Captain's insistence, prompted, he suspected, by Dr. McCoy. He could go without sleep for quite some time, but since he was here a few hours meditation would not come amiss. His demeanour on the bridge must have been less controlled than he had thought for the bridge crew to act with such tension, although the Captain's behaviour hadn't helped.

At that moment the buzzer at his door sounded. Spock thought for a moment. No-one would interrupt at this time unless it was important. Yet why had the intercom not been used?

"Come," he said.

When he saw who his visitors were an enquiring expression flickered across his face. No-one spoke. Ensign Layton seemed somewhat apprehensive, and moved closer to her companion, who looked only slightly less nervous. The First Officer didn't try to help them in any way, and at last Ensign Roberts spoke.

"Mr. Spock, Ensign Layton and I have combined our research into the theoretical and practical problems of communication anomalies." He paused, then went on quickly, "It's tentative, of course, but it just might be useful with this interference problem you're having."

"We've prepared a tape," Ensign Layton interjected quickly. "Dave - Mr. Roberts - is quite good with the auxiliary computer."

The young man in question flushed nervously. Spock ignored this, and held out his hand.

"I should be interested to see your conclusions, tentative or not." He took the computer tape from the young woman and with a quick, "Come with me," left the cabin.

The two Ensigns looked at each other in surprise and then turned and rushed out of the cabin after the already disappearing Vulcan.

The bridge was quiet, the air of tension which had developed over the past few days had largely been dispelled. Mr. Sulu had the con. The work continued as before, but in a more relaxed manner.

As the First Officer entered some of the crew looked somewhat guilty, though without apparent reason. Spock paused to motion Mr. Sulu to keep the con, and then went to the science station with the two Ensigns trailing behind him.

Mr. Chekov was taken by surprise. "I was just completing another scan, sir."

"So I see," his superior answered. "With the same lack of results, I take it?"

"Yes, sir," the luckless Ensign replied.

"I am going to try something new suggested by my companions," Spock continued, indicating his somewhat flustered followers.

The bridge was quiet apart from the usual background noises and the sound of the computer working. After some minutes the computer stopped and Spock addressed it.

"Has the new programme been successfully entered into the scanning interface?"

"Entered and working," the computer voice replied.

Spock began giving instructions. "Run planet observations taken in the last twenty scans and incorporate the new programme."

"Working," answered the computer.

There was silence. Spock and the three young Ensigns watched the screen, the rest of the bridge crew watched them.

After several minutes the computer stopped and said, "Run complete."

"Any anomalies or unusual phenomena?" Spock asked.

The computer answered, "Unexpectedly high heat emission Planet M46. Regular pulse Planet M47."

There was silence, then Spock spoke. "Analyse and give probably origin of regular pulse Planet M47."

"Working," the computer said.

The bridge crew waited expectantly. The fiction of a search and rescue exercise had worn a little thin in the past few days. Most of the crew now realised that something more was involved.

The computer spoke once again. "Pulse, Planet M47, probability 86% survival capsule, type R468 B963 or equivalent."

There was a long silence, then an excited cheer rose from the bridge crew, quickly cut off as the Captain came onto the bridge.

Spock turned to the two Ensigns. "My congratulations, Mr. Roberts, Ms. Layton. A most interesting and precise piece of work."

"Thank you, sir," they replied, stunned by this praise from the exacting Vulcan.

"I guess it really works," went on Ensign Layton with a smile.

"Chance had little to do with it, Ensign. Mr. Roberts' excellent mathematics and your clever if somewhat fanciful contribution have given us a most useful new tool."

The Captain made no comment at this almost fulsome praise. "I take it you've found a survival capsule down there, Spock?"

"That appears to be the case, Captain."

Kirk gave his most charming smile. "Well done, everyone. I suppose it's no good pretending we weren't looking for it. Well, Mr. Spock, shall we go down and take a look?"

"Yes, Captain, I think that would be a good idea."

Yeoman France took tea into the Security Commodore's office for the third time that morning. The Commodore sounded to have lost his temper again, though the man with whom he was angry seemed hardly to notice.

"Put the tray there, Yeoman."

The young Lieutenant opposite the Commodore sat in his chair in a very untidy manner; his uniform, entirely devoid of ship or department insignia, hung on his thin frame like a sack. The

Security Department had many secret organisations whose men were not even on Starfleet's official books.

This must be one of them, thought the yeoman. Nobody having gone through Starfleet Academy could have worn his uniform like that.

In that he was wrong, for the Lieutenant had been an ordinary Cadet until seconded to Security for a special assignment. Though the assignment was now nearly completed it didn't seem to give his superior much satisfaction.

Commodore Briggs continued after the yeoman had left. "You have no more idea where those Vulcans are than anybody else, and the only person who might know is dead, thanks to you."

The Lieutenant replied calmly, "If your man hadn't lost his head and fired at that Klingon's ship when he did, the survival capsule wouldn't have been needed. Anyway, even if it had still been there I don't think there would have been time to use it."

"We don't know that," his superior countered quickly. "You went back on our agreement. You didn't spend two years with those pirates to go soft on me at the last minute. We agreed no help from you for the prisoners. As far as you were concerned they were as good as dead, and there you are giving overrides for the survival capsule to a bunch of women and children. We were only a few weeks away from rounding them up. What went wrong?"

The Lieutenant was silent for some minutes. When at last he spoke he sounded defensive, yet at the same time unconcerned. "It was to keep me sane. Something concrete to put against all that killing, all that greed. I just wanted someone to escape. I managed to send you a final message. You got all the bases and all the agents, didn't you? Well, that capsule was the price you paid."

His superior gave him a long cool look and said in a calmer voice. "Oh right, we wiped out the pirates, and more important, we got their contacts. I'll give you that. But now I've got the Vulcan Council breathing down my neck. Oh, they're very polite, acknowledging our agent's contribution, but they want some facts about their nationals, and I don't blame them. There are 68 Vulcans missing and they think we - or rather, you - can and should come up with something."

"Yes, I know. I didn't spend all those extra weeks in a Federation prison for fun. You have the tapes of the conversations I had with the other prisoners, so you know as much as I do."

The Commodore walked over to the almost disinterested Lieutenant and towered over him. When he spoke his voice was almost soft, but none the less menacing for that. "What you did or didn't do is in the past, but you'll go over all the tapes of the interrogations, and everything we know, until you come up with something. Until then you belong to me. Afterwards you can go off and drown your guilt, or anything you like, but for now you give me all you've got. Do you understand?"

The Lieutenant looked the older man in the face. He didn't look frightened or intimidated - he just looked tired. "All right, I owe you that. I'll do my best."

The Commodore examined the other man carefully. Whatever he saw seemed to satisfy him, for he turned and walked away, and when he

spoke his voice had returned to normal. "Right, if you give me the details of the survival capsule I'll get someone onto it right away."

The Lieutenant looked almost embarrassed. "I don't think that will be necessary. The Enterprise is in that area, and I should be very surprised if they aren't doing an intensive search."

"The Enterprise?" The Commodore was startled for a moment, then he looked thoughtful. "Those two Starfleet officers who somehow got to see you - you passed them a message, didn't you? But how? I've studied that tape myself. You must have slipped something to them out of camera." Then, unexpectedly, he laughed. "The Doctor talked about a depressive state, but you've still got what it takes. You took an awful risk. Anyway, how do you know they are acting on the information?"

"They are not fools, Commodore. They are taking part in a training exercise, I understand. I don't think there's any doubt what they're really doing, do you?"

The Commodore looked thoughtful. "You're probably right. Anyway, that's something the Vulcans can't complain about if the Ambassador's son is in on the search. Well, if that's taken care of, let's get down to business. Where are you going to start?"

The Lieutenant gave a half smile. "If it's up to me, how about the Klingon Kalbas's ship, since your team managed to salvage it. There are one or two of his things I would like to look at."

Commodore Briggs nodded and walked over to his desk. "You've seen the list?" he asked as he tossed over a computer tape.

The other man caught it neatly. "Yes, I have, but never mind that. Let's have a look at the real thing."

The Commodore turned to his intercom and gave the necessary orders. While they waited he studied his subordinate carefully, but before he could say anything the door buzzer sounded and a Lieutenant-Commander entered carrying a large box.

"These are the things you asked for, sir. There are rather a lot of them. It seems our pirate friend was something of a collector."

"So I see. Well, Clifton, let's get started," the Commodore said as he opened the box and tipped its contents onto the floor.

There were many different items, all labelled, some in great detail, some with rather vague descriptions. The Lieutenant picked up a bag and after reading the label opened it and put the contents carefully on the desk.

Clifton picked up a bracelet in the shape of a snake and examined it. "I remember this. Kalba had it made from an ingot. He said he 'liberated' it from somewhere. He seemed very pleased about it. What he called 'liberate', you would call 'steal' - but from where, I wonder?"

The Lieutenant-Commander examined the label attached to the bracelet and then answered slowly, "It's made from Almogon B, which is only manufactured on the planet Culpit in Quadrant IV, so it must have come from there originally."

"He didn't get it in any of the raids, that I do know, and it's not something you can just pick up, however light-fingered you are."

Commodore Briggs said briskly, "Let's have Mr. Fitzroy in here. He's an expert on metals, perhaps he can enlighten us."

The Commodore soon passed on his request and after about ten minutes they were joined by a tall bald man of about 40 who, after studying the bracelet carefully, began to tell them about Almogon B.

"It's very valuable, as it's not mined any more, and the manufacturing process is very expensive. It's only used in warp engines, as far as I know, and it's certainly very difficult to obtain without a licence."

"Why did they stop mining it?" asked the Commodore.

"It's dangerous stuff in its raw state. Anyway, the mines were more or less played out, and what with equipment malfunction and the miners getting sick from the gases it just got too difficult. Then the Vulcans came up with their new process, so the Culpitians started using that instead."

"So the manufacturing process belongs to the Vulcans?" Lieutenant Clifton asked.

"Yes, and the Culpit government doesn't like it much. They tried to recruit Vulcan miners because the gas acts much more slowly on them, but it was still considered too dangerous. Then the Vulcans came up with this new process instead."

The Commodore looked very thoughtful. "The Culpitians don't like Vulcans much, do they?"

"Can't stand them. They're always trying to have the percentage they pay to the Vulcan Science Academy reduced, but you know what the Vulcans are like about patents. They haven't got a chance."

The Commodore put their uneasy thoughts into words. "If the Culpit mines could operate in secret with, say, slave labour, they could sell it at the manufactured price and make a fortune."

Mr. Fitzroy was shocked. "But it's a Federation planet!"

The other three were silent, then Mr. Clifton said, "Revenge and profit, with very little chance of being found out. Sounds all too likely to me."

The Commodore turned to Mr. Fitzroy. "Is it possible to tell the difference between manufactured and mined Almogon B?"

"It isn't easy, but it can be done."

"Very well. I want you to do the test yourself, and tell no-one."

Mr. Fitzroy looked stunned. "It will take me twelve hours, but I'll get on to it right away, and believe me, I'll tell nobody." He then walked out with the bracelet held gingerly in his hand.

The Commodore turned to the other two men. "If what we are thinking is true there's going to be trouble. I don't want the Vulcans to have any reason to think Starfleet didn't give full

co-operation on this one. If we get the result we are expecting I shall call the Vulcan ship T'Ann over here - for exercises, I think - and we shall pay a surprise visit to Quadrant IV."

The landing party was assembling on the hangar deck of the USS Enterprise. Dr. McCoy was already there checking his equipment when the Captain and First Officer arrived.

"I'm glad you two have decided to come clean at last. Now let's get this straight; there are likely to be two adults and four children down there, one adult and two of the children being Vulcan?"

"That is the information we have," Spock answered non-committally.

At that moment Security Lieutenant Redhawk entered carrying survival equipment. The Lieutenant was a Canadian of Red Indian descent whose friendly manner in no way hid his extreme competence in the field.

"Lieutenant Redhawk reporting for duty, sir."

The Captain nodded, but the Doctor looked at him in rather a surprised way. "Just the one, Jim?"

It was Spock who answered. "Because of the atmospheric difficulties we cannot use the transporter. We can only take four Enterprise personnel as, if all the escapees have survived, it would mean the shuttle making more than one trip, and there may not be time for that."

The Doctor gave him a sympathetic look. "I just hope the natives are friendly. I know your sensors say they are humanoid, but that can mean almost anything."

"Indeed," Spock replied somewhat dryly.

The Doctor said nothing, and after checking his equipment once more walked with Lt. Redhawk towards the shuttle.

"Will you be all right, Spock?" the Captain asked.

Spock for once answered not just the question but the intention behind it. "I shall be quite all right, Jim. I am a Vulcan, and whatever the outcome of the expedition, I shall behave as such."

The Captain smiled slightly. "Yes, I'm sure of that. It's just this waiting - it's getting to me."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "The preparations are complete, Captain."

"Well, come on, then - let's go." And with this Kirk walked towards the shuttlecraft, followed by Spock.

The shuttlecraft's approach to the planet was unsteady, but at last the vehicle came out of the turbulence and neared the survival capsule's landing site. The distortion which had made the search so difficult had almost disappeared, and the beacon from the capsule

could be read clearly.

Spock, who was piloting the shuttle, spoke. "Nearest possible landing site about 4 kilometres away from the capsule, sir."

"Fair enough, Spock. I guess we'll have to do some walking."

He didn't have to comment on what it meant for the survival capsule; a heavily wooded area wasn't the best of landing sites. With that in mind he gently touched his friend's sleeve for a moment, a gesture he rarely allowed himself, and then strapped himself into his seat and awaited events.

Spock landed the shuttle with his usual skill. After the instruments had been shut down they shared the survival equipment between them. Spock carried a tricorder, from which he discovered the direction of the capsule, so he led the way. The going was easier than it had at first appeared. Although a steady drizzle fell and the ground was rather boggy they made good time; after about fifty minutes they reached their destination.

The survival capsule had not had an easy landing. It was lying among broken trees and shrubs at a 40 degree angle. The door, which was facing halfway towards the sky, was closed. They stopped about 10 metres away. Spock's face was as expressionless as always, but his tension was apparent in his posture.

Captain Kirk spoke to the Doctor and security man. "You two stay here." Thankfully, they sat on a fallen log.

The Captain turned to Spock and, taking the tricorder from him, spoke almost gently. "I'll come and give you a hand with the door."

Without a word Spock moved forward, slowly at first, and then more quickly as they neared the capsule. Initially the door wouldn't move, but at last it was open. The Captain jumped down from the broken tree on which he had been standing and stood with his back to the door while the other man went inside.

Several minutes passed, the only sound being the wind in the trees. Spock came out of the capsule, closed the door, and jumped down to join the Captain. The Human, after one quick look at his friend, seemed to relax slightly, but he said nothing, and after a few moments Spock spoke, his voice as expressionless as his face, which seemed set in stone.

"Two bodies in the capsule, Captain, both of them Vulcan. Both apparently died as a result of the rough landing. There is a note giving information about the other occupants in my mother's hand."

Jim Kirk turned to his Vulcan friend and smiled slightly. "Well, that sounds pretty straightforward, Spock. All we need do is to follow the directions and we should find them."

"As you say, Captain. The directions are not very precise, but are as good as could be expected."

The two men walked over to their rather wet companions, who were still sitting on the log. The results of the search were soon told.

The Doctor got to his feet. "I think I ought to look at the bodies before we go any further."

Spock said, "The capsule is in a precarious position, Doctor. However, there is no need for you to take the risk. My identification of the bodies will be quite acceptable under the circumstances."

"Very well," Dr. McCoy agreed with a sigh. Examining dead bodies was a part of his work he didn't enjoy.

"If that's settled, then," said the Captain, "let's think about moving off. Mr. Spock, how long before dark?"

Spock answered, "In this latitude, Captain, 4 hours 32 minutes."

"Right," the Captain said briskly. "Come on - let's go."

The four men set off in the same order as before, walking in the indicated direction. As they set out the Captain handed Spock the tricorder and the already wet note. Spock looked at the note for a moment and then carefully tucked it away.

They walked without speaking through the trees and undergrowth. The terrain and weather stayed much the same. They stopped when it got dark and Mr. Redhawk erected a small tent while Spock prepared survival rations. The four men said very little as they ate their sparse meal and settled down for the night. The drizzle had turned into heavy rain, and the men were cold and miserable.

As soon as it began to get light they gladly ate another plain but no doubt sustaining meal, and after folding up the tent set out once more. The day was still overcast and cold, but the rain had stopped, and as their clothes dried out they moved at a quicker pace.

The Captain and Spock were for the most part silent, both deep in thought, but the other two men talked as they walked. Among other things they talked about ice hockey, about which Mr. Redhawk, being a Canadian, was an enthusiast.

Suddenly they heard a voice to their left about 80 metres away. The voice was cursing loudly in a strangely accented but quite understandable French.

Mr. Redhawk smiled and whispered to the Doctor, "Just the kind of language you might hear at any ice hockey match."

"Never mind that," the Captain said. "Lieutenant, you and I will go and see what's going on. Spock, you and Bones stay out of sight and cover us."

Before Spock could reply he went forward with Mr. Redhawk close behind him. Spock and Dr. McCoy had no option but to obey.

The two men came out onto a small road running between the trees. The road was muddy and uneven, and at the side of it stood a small cart pulled by a strange animal about the size of a donkey, but with dark red fur, sturdy legs and a long thin face. The animal was still fastened to the cart, which was half on its side with one of the primitive wheels broken. With the cart was a humanoid, small of stature with dark brown skin. His clothes could have come from a mediaeval picture. His cloak, though of much coarser cloth and of different cut, was not dissimilar to theirs.

When he saw the two men he stopped cursing and eyed them suspiciously. Mr. Redhawk spoke to him in French, his second language.

"Good day, sir. You seem to have had an accident. Can we be of any help?"

The man didn't speak for a moment, not seeming too pleased by the offer. "Where do you spring from? Strangers around here, aren't you? I can tell that by the funny way you speak. Don't just stand there - help me get the wheel off and perhaps we can get somewhere."

The two men did as they were told. The Captain thought ruefully that if the man considered Mr. Redhawk's accent strange, it was as well he hadn't spoken first, as his French left much to be desired.

It was the Lieutenant who answered. "Yes, we are strangers here. We had to leave our transport and are looking for the nearest town or village. Perhaps you could help us?"

The man paused after removing the wheel from the side of the cart. "The nearest village is about 6 kilometres down the road, although you'll not find much there. Where are you heading, anyway?" He jumped when he was answered not by the Lieutenant, but by Mr. Spock, who had come out of the trees.

"We are looking for some companions who passed this way some weeks ago. I wonder if you have seen them?" he asked in impeccable French.

The cart owner looked at him for a long moment and answered with a harsh laugh, "I could have. What were they like - although if they looked anything like you I'd have remembered. You sure are a strange one."

Mr. Spock ignored the personal implication of the comment. "One of the children could well have been of my physical type, but the others, a woman with fair hair and two children, were more of my companions' appearance."

"No, I haven't seen anybody like that. On their own, were they, and on foot like you?"

"I understand that to be the case."

"Folks round here aren't that friendly. Did they have any money?"

"No, I understand they had no money with them. But there would be a chance of some aid in the village, perhaps?" Spock asked almost hopefully.

"I don't know about that. They might have got to the village, they might have ended up with the Baron." And he waved his hand to the left.

"This Baron you speak of, he lives in that direction?"

"Yes. The village is to the right and the Baron's farm to the left."

Spock was silent, but the Captain could contain himself no longer, poor accent or not. "Then our friends are more likely to

have gone to the Baron's. Tell us about him."

The old man pulled a face, but when he answered he was obviously trying to be helpful. "He farms a large tract of land away from the town. He can't get help over there, so any passing strangers could find themselves enslaved. If the children were old enough to work they should be all right. Providing you've got money, and arrive in force, you might come to some arrangement with the Baron."

It was the Captain who answered. "Money could be a problem. We shall have to think of something else."

"No money! Look, my name's Balco. I'm a trader. If you've got anything to sell I might be able to help you. When we get to the village, of course - my funds are there."

His sudden caution was not lost on the Captain. "We haven't got anything to trade, but if we intended to rob you we would have done it by now."

"True. Well, if this young man has finished putting on the wheel and if your other friend will come out of the trees, I'll give you a lift to the crossroads and tell you about the Baron on the way." With this Dr. McCoy stepped onto the road.

The Captain answered, "Agreed. If your animal can pull our weight we'll take you up on your offer."

So they set out. The animal, a Beastial according to Balco, was stronger than it looked and pulled them at a slow but steady pace. By the time they reached the crossroads an understanding had been reached.

They got off the cart and Balco said, "I don't think much of the Baron or his ways; it's bad for trade. If you were to find your way up there after dark, who knows what you'd find."

"You've been very helpful," the Captain said.

"You helped me so I returned the favour. I shan't tell anyone I've seen you, though I'm not sure they'd believe me if I did. I should keep your green-skinned friend out of sight, if I were you - someone might take him for a witch, or a gypsy like me." With that he got back in his cart and laughing to himself drove it slowly down the right fork.

Captain Kirk spoke to Spock. "We can easily reach the farm by nightfall, and then take a careful look round."

Spock checked his tricorder. "The humanoids of this planet are indistinguishable from Humans, Captain. Indeed, as their use of an Earth language cannot be coincidence they must be of the same stock. However, I have adjusted my tricorder to pick up Vulcan readings. If the Vulcan child is at the farm I should be able to pinpoint him."

"Very well. If you can manage that we shall at least know where one of them is."

Night was falling. The weather was wet and cold. The four men were standing at the edge of a small wood looking at some low stone buildings about 100 metres away. The buildings were surrounded by

Fields just visible in the gathering gloom.

Spock was studying his tricorder intently; the others waited for him to speak, but Dr. McCoy could contain himself no longer.

"Can your superior Vulcan eyesight see anything, Spock? I can hardly see a thing, and it's getting darker all the time."

"Yes, Doctor, the light is sufficient. The long low building on the right contains 20 individuals, one of whom is undoubtedly Vulcan. The larger building has about the same number of humanoids. I cannot be more precise at the moment."

"Let's try the long building. It's probably accommodation for the help," the Captain suggested.

"If the Vulcan child is there the chances are that the others are too," the Doctor said.

"Let's hope so, but how are we going to get to the boy without anyone seeing us?" the Captain asked.

It was Spock who answered, his voice firm. "I suggest we wait until the occupants of the hut are asleep, then I will try to contact Sannec. With his superior hearing I should be able to contact him without disturbing the others."

"You hope!" snorted the Doctor. "It's a bit chancy, isn't it?"

"Not at all. There are acceptable odds on success - unless you have a better plan?"

"No, it isn't that. It's just I don't think you should go alone."

"I'll go with him," the Captain interjected.

"Well, that's settled, then. All there is to do is wait," said the Doctor. "I seem to be spending a lot of time hanging about in woods. It's Mr. Redhawk here who's the Indian, not me, you know. Come on, Lieutenant - let's go and find a comfortable tree to lean against."

Time passed. The night was now very dark. Though the rain had stopped it was still cloudy. At last Spock spoke.

"The occupants of both buildings give every indication of being asleep, Captain," he said quietly.

"Right," Captain Kirk answered. "Bones, you and the Lieutenant keep well out of sight and we'll get back to you as soon as we can. Well, Mr. Spock, shall we go?"

"If you will follow me, Captain?" And, after pulling his cloak around him Spock began walking silently towards the farm, closely followed by his Captain.

After they had gone Dr. McCoy turned to his companion. "You ought to have been the one to go with Spock."

"You may be right, but I know it wouldn't have been any good telling the Captain that. However, I am pretty good at horse stealing, and if we don't want to have to walk back that could come

in very useful."

"Don't tempt me! That sounds like the most sensible idea I've heard all day."

The long barrack-like hut was silent as they approached. There was a door at one end which seemed to be the only entrance. Spock checked his tricorder again. It must have registered something because after a moment he walked towards the door and, removing a small whistle from his clothing, put it to his lips and blew. Captain Kirk, standing just behind him, heard nothing.

They waited, then Spock tried again. Silence. A few minutes passed, and nothing stirred. Then at last a soft tapping could be heard on the other side of the door.

Spock took the lock which held the door and pulled. With a loud crack it broke, scattering pieces all over the ground. There was silence; nobody shouted, nobody seemed to have heard. After a couple of minutes they took hold of the door and pulled it open. They peered into the dark room beyond, and as they did so a small figure appeared in front of them. Captain Kirk could distinguish little else, but Spock stepped forward without hesitation and spoke softly. He received a quick reply and then turned and joined Captain Kirk outside.

Spock carefully closed the door. As he did so the Captain saw by the light of the moon, which appeared for the first time from behind the clouds, a Vulcan youth, somewhat smaller than he had expected but with the unexpressive, all-too-familiar Vulcan visage. Spock walked quickly away from the hut followed by the boy and Captain Kirk.

When the parties were reunited the two Vulcans immediately engaged in a whispered conversation, and it was left to Captain Kirk to reassure the other two men. After several minutes Spock turned to his colleagues.

"The two Human children are in what we were correct in assuming is the fieldhands' accommodation." No-one answered and he went on, "Lady Amanda, however, has been helping in the kitchen and is, therefore, sleeping in the farmhouse."

"Well, at least she's here. That's a relief, isn't it, Spock?" the Doctor said.

Spock ignored this and it was Captain Kirk who answered.

"Yes, it's nice to know, but how are we going to find her without disturbing the others?"

Spock answered at once, any relief or pleasure he felt at knowing his mother's whereabouts carefully hidden. "Sannec tells me that my mother occupies a small room on the ground floor next to the kitchen. I suggest we split up. Sannec is convinced he can wake the other two children and bring them to the door without waking the other sleepers. If Dr. McCoy and Lieutenant Redhawk were then to take them to the comparative safety of the trees, the Captain and I could meet them there after fetching Lady Amanda."

"What about transport?" the Lieutenant asked. "Are there any of

those animals here? If so they could be useful."

The Vulcans spoke together, then the boy stopped to allow his elder to give the information.

"Sannec informs me there are twelve such beasts stabled in a building attached to the farm. He and the other children are familiar with them, therefore it would be useful to acquire them, but it must be done silently."

Mr. Redhawk grinned into the darkness. "Leave that to me. Horse stealing is my speciality, you might say."

Spock answered dryly, "Since the animals are not horses, and Starfleet does not encourage stealing, that would not normally be a recommendation, Lieutenant."

"However, as things are we'll use whatever talents we have. It's worth a try," Captain Kirk interjected. "Sannec, you go with Dr. McCoy and Mr. Redhawk, and get those kids and the Beastials, if you can, and Mr. Spock and I will go to the farmhouse. We'll meet back here. Any questions?"

No-one answered, and after a moment he drew his phaser. "Put your phasers on stun. Let's hope we don't have to use them, but if necessary we will."

The Starfleet officers checked their phasers and after brief farewells split into two groups and slipped silently into the darkness.

The farmhouse had windows both front and back, and after examining it carefully Spock indicated a window and whispered to the Captain,

"According to Sannec, this is the correct window. Apparently there are no guards after dark, but the farm is locked."

This time he used his phaser, which quickly disintegrated the lock. Nothing stirred and Spock pushed the door, which opened with a creak. The room beyond, apparently the kitchen, was dark and silent, but Spock obviously had no difficulty seeing as he walked quickly across the floor. After dealing with a second door in a quick and violent manner he disappeared inside.

Captain Kirk's eyes adjusted to the dark and he could just see the kitchen, but he made no attempt to move from the doorway. All remained silent.

Several minutes passed, and just as the Captain was beginning to worry two figures entered the room from the second door. The shorter of the two walked to a table in the middle of the room and lit a small lamp. Even in the poor light this afforded Captain Kirk had no difficulty in recognising the Lady Amanda.

She walked quickly towards the Captain and took his hands in hers for a moment. "Hello, Captain," she said with a smile.

Captain Kirk, with a feeling of real relief, kissed her on the cheek. "Amanda, it's good to see you."

"That's mutual, I can assure you, Captain. Fortunately, I am the only one who sleeps downstairs, but we must still be quiet. We must wrap all the food we can in those tablecloths." She indicated a small pile on the table.

Captain Kirk was reassuring. "That won't be necessary. We have enough food for everyone."

"It's not for us, Captain, it's for the other workers. You don't think I'm going to leave them here when we go, do you?"

The Captain looked at Spock. "I'm sorry, that's not possible. This is all taking too long."

"Nonsense. And don't try pulling rank on me - that's been tried." She looked at her son with a twinkle in her eye. "And don't think of using force - the Ambassador wouldn't like it. Please, Jim, Spock. It may not be logical, but I know it's the right thing to do."

The Captain picked up a cloth and handed it to Spock. "Come on, Spock - it seems we've got our orders."

The animals in the stable were large and shaggy, but obviously of a friendly nature. Lieutenant Redhawk and Sannec were soon putting saddles on them while Dr. McCoy reassured the two Human children, who were still somewhat bemused by their rescue.

Mr. Redhawk turned to Dr. McCoy. "We had better put bridles on them all and lead them away from the farm, then when they find some of their workers have escaped they'll have no chance of catching up with us."

"Good idea, but do you think we can manage them?"

It was Sannec who replied. "The Beastials are very docile. They should not give any trouble."

"Come on, then," said the Doctor. "Show me what to do, then we can all give a hand."

They were all carrying out this task when suddenly Sannec lifted his head and motioned the others to silence. "Someone coming," he mouthed to the Doctor.

The three children hid behind the animals while Dr. McCoy and the Lieutenant stood on either side of the door, phasers drawn. Captain Kirk entered, his phaser at the ready. After a quick appraisal he visibly relaxed, but it was the Doctor who spoke.

"Hell, Jim, you gave us quite a fright. What are you doing here, anyway?"

The Captain didn't have time to answer before two other figures entered the barn. Dr. McCoy stepped forward, and taking Amanda in a big hug kissed her soundly on the cheek. She laughed up at him, and it was she who answered his question.

"We are here at my request, Doctor. It has been agreed to take all the animals and use them to help the other workers to escape."

The Doctor grinned. "That's one agreement I must certainly hear more about some time, but if it's possible it's certainly worth trying."

The Vulcan youth, on hearing this, spoke up firmly. "The hut does not have a guard at night, as you know, and it is far enough away from the main building for any noise not to carry. It should, therefore, present no real problem."

"Talks just like you, Spock," the Doctor commented. "I suppose that means he doesn't think it should be too difficult."

Spock ignored the first part of this remark. "You, Doctor, are to take Lady Amanda and the two Human children, together with four Beastials, to the original meeting place in the trees. The rest of us will join you there as soon as the other prisoners have been released and given the means to remove themselves from the immediate area."

"How long before they check the hut, Sannec?" Captain Kirk asked.

"No-one comes near before dawn, which is in about two hours time."

"We had better get a move on, then."

They split into two groups, one going towards the trees, the other making once more for the long barrack-like hut. The weather had improved and the rain held off, although it was still cold. The small party in the trees talked quietly. They heard very little, but once there was the sound of an animal coughing and distant voices. At last figures could be seen approaching, and soon the parties were reunited.

Spock addressed his mother. "The prisoners have got away safely, though they seemed unwilling to leave until we convinced them of their captor's inability to follow."

"That's because the law is in the Baron's pay. They know they must leave the area before the alarm is raised."

"That also explains why no guards were considered necessary. I had wondered."

The Captain joined them. "We must leave as soon as possible. Spock, if you and your mother go on one Beastial, each of the children can then share an animal with an adult."

"Very well, Captain."

Lady Amanda turned to the Human children and, speaking to them gently, led them to their riding companions, who lifted them onto their mounts.

Captain Kirk turned to Sannec, who was standing beside him. "You're riding with me, Sannec."

The boy did not answer, but mounted the remaining animal, and Captain Kirk swung himself up behind him. He then gave the word and they began walking the animals through the trees towards the road.

The animal's motion was rather strange, but they soon became

accustomed to it and eventually they reached the road. The moon was still shining, and though it had only a faint light it made things easier. They quickened their pace and soon reached the crossroads where they had parted company with the cart. They kept going until, just as the sky was beginning to lighten, Spock, who was in the lead, stopped his animal and the others followed suit.

"It will be necessary to enter the trees here to reach the shuttle."

Captain Kirk examined the trees thoughtfully. "We had better dismount and leave the animals here."

Mr. Redhawk interjected quickly, "We can't let them go, sir. They might return to their stables and be used to follow our trail. Someone who knew the area might just catch up with us. We could probably lead them. In fact, the children could still ride if care were taken choosing the trail."

The Captain answered with a smile, "I bow to your superior knowledge, Mr. Redhawk." He then turned to Mr. Spock. "Your mother could stay in the saddle too, Spock. I'll lead the way and tell you about any overhanging branches, etcetera."

"I concur, Jim. If we go in this direction," and he indicated a direction on his tricorder, "we should eventually reach the shuttlecraft."

The party formed itself into single file and with the Captain in the lead set off through the trees. The going was somewhat rough, but not impossible, and they walked in silence for some hours. It was now daylight, and the weather was still dry and a little warmer.

At last Spock spoke. "Captain, we are now approaching the survival capsule. It would, I think, be better if it were not left here to be discovered at a later date."

"You're right, Spock. Will you deal with it?"

Spock nodded, and turning to Sannec said, "Both the survival capsule and its contents must be destroyed. There is not the time nor the resources for it to be otherwise. Since you are the only member of your family present you must stand witness for your mother and sister."

The boy was still for a moment, but when he replied his voice was quite steady. "It must and will be so." He then climbed unaided from the Beastial's back and walked forward without another word.

The Captain and First Officer exchanged a glance, and then the two Vulcans walked through the trees to where the survival capsule could be seen. There was silence for a few minutes, then the unmistakable sound of a phaser reached the ears of the larger party. The two Vulcans rejoined the others, both faces with that harsh Vulcan stillness well known to at least two of the remaining adults. Then the Captain was suddenly busy giving orders.

"We are now near enough to the shuttle to release the animals. Leave the saddles on, but fasten the reins to the pommels. By the time they are found or get back to their stables we should be long gone."

Indeed, after they had dismounted and carried out the Captain's

orders the animals, when released, wandered off a few metres and began grazing peacefully.

Spock consulted his tricorder and turned to his Captain. "The shuttlecraft is in that direction."

"Very well, Spock. Lead the way."

Spock set off, followed by the rest of the party.

The shuttlecraft was just as they had left it. The door was soon opened and the party quickly went inside. Spock went at once to check the controls, and it was left to the Captain to seat the passengers.

Dr. McCoy took the Captain to one side. "They seem to be in quite good health. A bit on the thin side, but nothing to worry about."

"I'm glad to hear it, Doctor. Now let's see if Spock's report is as encouraging." With this he went forward to speak to Spock.

Spock's tone was brisk and even. "The shuttle is in good order and we shall be able to lift off in 3.5 minutes, sir."

"What about communications?"

"The atmospheric interference is still present, but the Enterprise should be recording our presence even though further contact is not possible at this time."

"Right. I'll tell the passengers we're about to lift off."

The shuttlecraft rose slowly at first, but was soon going well. When it hit the turbulence it slowed somewhat, but progress was still maintained. Captain Kirk could see that Spock had the craft under control, and therefore went back to sit beside Lady Amanda. She smiled at him gently as he did so.

"It's going to be a bit rough, but nothing to worry about."

"Of course, Captain. I have every confidence in you both. I'm sure it can't have been easy finding us, never mind mounting a rescue, but here we are. Now tell me in more detail how that came about."

Captain Kirk told what he knew about the capture of the pirates and the resulting information, and concluded, "You'll have to ask Spock what Vulcan strings he pulled to get us this far."

"Perhaps later, though I think his father will want to do so when he is eventually found."

The Captain was silent. He could think of nothing to say. He could hardly talk to the wife of a Vulcan about long odds, and being an intelligent woman, she surely didn't need or want to hear his depressing professional opinion.

She, however, read his face without difficulty. "Thank you for not mouthing platitudes, Jim, but this I will say. I know my husband is alive. Now don't say anything," she went on as he made to speak. "Marriage to a Vulcan is as much as anything a mental joining. Even as a non-Vulcan I would know if he were dead. Somewhere he lives.

Spock accepts I have this knowledge and so must you. As to the future, we shall have to see, but at least these children are safe, against all odds."

Captain Kirk looked at her. "Someone spoke to me recently of your courage, ma'am. Though I'm not sure I liked the source I can only agree with the sentiment."

"You flatter me, I fancy; and as for that source, I think you mean our pirate friend. That young man puzzles me. Perhaps there is more to him than meets the eye."

The Captain looked thoughtful. "Maybe so. Now if you will excuse me, I'll go and see how Spock is doing." And with this he got up and joined his First Officer.

Spock addressed the Captain as he sat down beside him. "We shall be out of the atmosphere in 4.46 minutes, sir. We should then be able to re-establish communications with the Enterprise."

Captain Kirk watched as the long fingers handled the controls so dexterously, but said nothing. Suddenly the craft stopped shaking, and there were the stars, bright and lovely against a dark background; and there, brighter than any star, was the Enterprise, distant but unmistakable.

"My congratulations, Mr. Spock. An excellent piece of work."

"Not at all, Captain," was the calm reply. "Just the correct interpretation of data."

"It's just that you have better sight than most," the Captain said with a smile.

"I certainly have better sight than Humans, so consequently I have more facts to work with. Now if you will excuse me we are being hailed by the Enterprise."

Indeed, after a moment the voice of the Chief Engineer could be heard. "Enterprise calling shuttlecraft. Are you receiving me?"

"Hello, Scotty, Kirk here. Receiving you loud and clear."

"Nice to hear your voice, Captain. I trust your mission was successful?"

Kirk gave a quick resume of the rescue, and Mr. Scott's reaction was as much as could be expected.

"I am delighted to hear that Lady Amanda and the three children are well. It's a shame about the two deaths, but it could have been worse."

"How are things with you, Mr. Scott?"

"Everything's fine with the Enterprise, Captain, but Admiral Bryce wants to speak to you with some urgency. He contacted us 24 hours ago. When I told him you were on a rescue mission he didn't seem too pleased about your absence. Anyway, he wants you to contact him on the USS T'Ann as soon as you can."

The Captain looked pensive. "He didn't give any indication of the reason?"

"No, though there has been a lot of activity in Quadrant IV during the last few days."

"Okay, Scotty, we'll be docking in... em..." He turned to Spock.

"Twenty two minutes ten seconds, Captain."

"Did you get that, Scotty?"

"I did indeed, so I'll see you then. Enterprise out."

"The T'Ann's an all-Vulcan ship isn't it, Spock?"

"Yes, Captain, assigned to Quadrant U under Captain Sarra."

Captain Kirk looked thoughtful. "I wonder what she's doing in Quadrant IV with Admiral Bryce aboard? No doubt we'll find out in due course."

"No doubt," Spock replied dryly. Admiral Bryce's somewhat abrasive personality didn't go down too well with most Vulcans, but no doubt his colleagues could take care of themselves.

The shuttlecraft made a standard landing on the hangar deck and soon the crew and passengers were disembarking. They were met by Mr. Scott, who after a brief greeting for Lady Amanda, turned to Captain Kirk.

"I've informed the Admiral of the outcome of your trip, Captain. He will contact you in about an hour's time, at 04.00."

"Good, that'll give me time to get cleaned up. Have Lieutenant Uhura pipe it down to my cabin." He turned to Spock. "You'd better come to my cabin in about an hour, Spock. I'd like you to be there."

"Very well, Captain."

They walked over to the passengers and the Doctor said, "Amanda and the children had better come to sickbay first, Jim. I want to check them out thoroughly."

"All right, Bones. Spock, you go with them and see they are settled in." He then turned to the children. "Once the Doctor has looked you over you can have something to eat and a rest, then if you like you can see round the ship. I'll contact your parents, and before you know it you'll be back with them."

The little girl Susan spoke in a soft but confident voice. "Lady Amanda said that Starfleet would be looking for us, and we would be safe when we got onto a Starship."

"Yes, of course," the Captain answered, rather embarrassed.

The Human boy, Peter, spoke just as confidently. "Anyway, Lady Amanda is Mr. Spock's mother, and she said he would be looking for us real hard."

Spock did not look at all embarrassed at this artless statement, but Amanda pulled a face. "I had every confidence in you, Spock, and saw no reason why I shouldn't share it."

"I trust it proved a comfort to them, Mother. However, you and

Sannec must have been aware that the possibility of rescue was not high."

"We never discussed actual odds. Perhaps because I'm a teacher, not a mathematician, I've always believed in positive thinking. Something I share with Captain Kirk, I think."

"You certainly do," the Captain answered with a smile. "Now, if you will excuse me, I would like to hear Mr. Scott's report."

"Of course. And good luck with the Admiral."

Her son raised an eyebrow at that remark, but made no comment. After brief farewells they all left the hangar deck.

The Captain's cabin was quiet. Both the Captain and his First Officer were present, both once again in uniform and both waiting for Lt. Uhura to put them in contact with Admiral Bryce. The Captain, reading reports at his desk, seemed unconcerned, as of course did Mr. Spock.

At last the Communications Officer's voice was heard. "I have the Admiral for you now, Captain."

The Admiral's voice was surprisingly friendly. "Captain Kirk, congratulations on your rescue mission. I am pleased to be able to tell you we have had similar success in finding the missing Vulcans."

Captain Kirk was startled, and he felt Spock, who was at his side, stiffen, although he did not speak.

"Is Ambassador Sarek among them, Admiral?" the Captain asked quickly.

"Yes, he is."

Spock still said nothing. Captain Kirk did not look at him, but went on,

"My First Officer is here with me, sir. I am sure he would like to reassure his mother about the Ambassador."

"Is he, indeed. Well, I am pleased to tell you both that Ambassador Sarek is in good health, as are all the other Vulcans, except for a few who were killed in a rock fall. He is at the moment talking to the Vulcan Science Academy to ask them to suspend the manufacturing patent awarded to the Culpit government."

At this Mr. Spock spoke, the only thing his voice seemed to express being curiosity. "Why is Ambassador Sarek suggesting such a punitive measure against the Culpetians?"

"With good reason. Apparently the Intelligence Division had an agent among the pirates, who came across some mined Almogan B. Someone put two and two together. The Culpetians were buying Vulcans from the pirates and using them as slave labour. The Vulcan ship T'Ann was brought in secret to Culpit and military law imposed. Once we knew where to look the Vulcans were soon located. The rescue team from the T'Ann were almost frighteningly efficient, and they managed to overcome the guards without loss of life."

Spock was the first to recover after this surprising and shocking recital. It was not, however, a personal comment but a question in his usual even voice, filled again only with curiosity.

"The enslaving of fellow members of the Federation is unprecedented, and I am sure will be regarded in the gravest light by all its members. But why, I wonder, does Sarek consider the suspending of the Almogon B manufacturing patent so urgent?"

"A good question. The Culpetians are all claiming they know nothing about the whole thing, but if their livelihood is in jeopardy they are likely to be more forthcoming."

"Well it should certainly help," the Captain said wryly. "I imagine things are pretty hectic over there?"

"Yes indeed. The Vulcan High Council is determined that everyone concerned should be found. That's why all this is top secret for the moment. Starfleet is giving its full cooperation. Captain Sarra and I are in charge at this end of the operation. As soon as Ambassador Sarek has finished talking to the Vulcan Science Academy I'll inform him of his wife's whereabouts. No doubt he will want to speak to her."

"I should imagine so, Admiral," Captain Kirk answered. "I am sure Mr. Spock will want to bring Lady Amanda up to date, so he can arrange the communication details."

"Excellent. Shall we say 06.00 hours? The Ambassador should be free by then."

"Right, Spock, you go and see to that while I get our final instructions from the Admiral."

"Very well, Captain," Spock said, and after acknowledging his Captain's half smile with a nod, he left the cabin.

The Admiral continued after a short pause, "Now, Kirk, I want you here at Culpit as soon as possible. When the Vulcans have made statements to the lawyers I want them out of here. The USS T'Ann can take them to Vulcan, and you can take over from her and help me sort out this mess. You are to call at Domian on the way, pick up Commodore Briggs and his team and get them over here. The Vulcans are as polite and correct as usual, but their presence here isn't helping the situation one bit."

"That's hardly their fault, Admiral."

"Of course not, and believe me, nobody is going to get away with anything, the Federation Council is very insistent about that. Justice will be swift and thorough. That this should happen between two Federation planets is bad enough, but to the Vulcans, of all people! They may not be liked by everyone, but they are greatly respected for their integrity, and there are few planets who haven't benefited from their scientific or medical expertise. The Vulcans are talking about justice, but if we are not careful somebody will be talking about lynching."

"I'm sure you'll have everything under control before that can happen, Admiral."

"I certainly shall," the Admiral agreed firmly. "Now, Captain Kirk, you have your orders?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Admiral Bryce out."

Amanda looked at her husband on the viewscreen. All that needed to be said between them had been, but still she hesitated to break contact. She therefore repeated the arrangements made for her transfer to the T'Ann.

"The Enterprise should reach Culpit in four days time.. When do you think the T'Ann will leave for Vulcan?"

Her husband thought he understood the problem and answered reassuringly, "Not for some days after that, though if necessary Captain Sarra would delay his departure so that we may travel together."

"Yes, of course. Starfleet has been most helpful in this matter."

"Not without reason. Its Administration and Transport divisions have been less than alert on Culpit, as they must be aware."

"Yet the Intelligence Department seems to have done a good job," Amanda suggested tentatively. She knew her husband didn't hold Commodore Briggs or his department in very high regard, but Sarek could still surprise her, and did so now.

"They did an excellent job. Their agent did acquire the necessary information, though I understand he did not obey all his orders to the letter."

"The main reason I am here now," his wife observed.

"One of the reasons, certainly. Not the best managed of affairs, but the outcome was all that could be desired."

"You're not going to make an official complaint about that boy, are you?"

"No. In the circumstances I shall, if the final report is satisfactory, be recommending a commendation."

"I'm glad. What about Spock - he seems to have used your influence to good effect, don't you think?"

"He did what was necessary."

"Then perhaps you could tell him so."

"You wish me to speak to him?" Sarek just managed to stifle what in a Human husband would have been a sigh.

His wife smiled sweetly. "Only if you have something to say to him, of course."

The husband and the Vulcan Ambassador knew when he had been out-maneuvred - not for the first time, and no doubt not for the last. He therefore gave in to the logic of the situation.

"If Spock is available I will speak to him now."

"Good. He's in his cabin. I'll get the Communications Officer to connect you."

Spock was going through the never-ending paperwork when Lt. Uhura contacted him, and he pushed his papers to one side. When Sarek appeared on the screen he waited for his father to speak to him. Sarek looked much as usual, and Spock knew better than to comment on his imprisonment or inquire about his health.

"Sarek," he acknowledged.

The Ambassador didn't waste time on pleasantries with junior family members. "I have received Dr. McCoy's report on your mother's health. It is quite satisfactory. I would now like to hear the details of your involvement in her rescue."

His son answered at once, giving a full account of all the influence and finance expended to acquire the required information, then going on to tell of the outcome of the search and the eventual return to the Enterprise.

Sarek listened in silence, and when Spock had finished imparted information of his own.

"The four leading pirates were found guilty. The youth who was only just of age was sent to a rehabilitation centre. The rest were officially executed two days ago."

"Including Philip Johnson?"

"Philip Johnson is officially dead. However, when Commodore Briggs joins the Enterprise one of his aides will be a Lieutenant Iain Clifton, who has a similar physical appearance."

"I see," was Spock's only comment.

"Starfleet seems to regard this somewhat elaborate subterfuge as necessary. You and your Captain are the only Enterprise personnel to be made aware of the full facts."

"What about Mother? She seems to suspect something."

"I will speak to your mother on the matter. As to the means used to acquire information about our whereabouts, you seem to have made logical use of the family resources available, with satisfactory results. Being a member of a diplomatic family has not been entirely lost on you, it would seem."

Spock's reply was calm, though his father's comments were unexpected. "Being a Starfleet officer was also most useful."

"Perhaps," was the only reply; but it was enough - at least for the moment.

Captain Kirk sat back with a sigh of well-being. Spock's personal problems seemed to be at an end and his ship was back on an even keel. There was just the mopping up of the Culpit business, but he was sure that would soon be sorted out. He was just thinking about a drink and a chat with Dr. McCoy when there was a buzz at his

door.

"Come," he said, hoping this wasn't more problems. When he saw who had entered he hid a smile. "Ensign Roberts, Ensign Layton, what can I do for you?"

Spock had told him about these two young peoples' tentative approach with regard to the communications anomaly, and this looked like an action replay. Both seemed dumbstruck, and Ensign Layton was clutching her companion's hand as if for support. The Captain wasn't Vulcan, however, and had just decided to help them out when Ensign Roberts spoke.

"Ensign Layton... um... Rosemary and I would like permission to marry as soon as possible, sir."

"Well, thank goodness for that," was his Captain's reply. "It's taken you long enough to come to an agreement. Even Mr. Spock noticed you both going round like love's young dream."

Mr. Roberts looked hurt. "I didn't know it was so obvious."

"Why do you think you were put in charge of Mr. Spock's maths class? I know Spock is an unlikely cupid, but there you are."

"That was Commander Spock's reason?" asked Mr. Roberts.

"Well, after Dr. McCoy and I pointed out its necessity he saw the logic of it, so it must have been one of them."

"We do have your permission, sir?" asked a somewhat bemused Mr. Roberts.

"You have - if I can be the first to kiss the bride," the Captain answered with a smile.

Lieutenant Clifton looked at the view through the Enterprise's recreation deck window. He had a lot to think about. He had just received a note telling him of the back pay due to him for his work of the past two years. It was all very distasteful.

Fortunately Captain Kirk and Commander Spock were treating him like a stranger, and he had managed to avoid meeting most of the other Vulcans, although Ambassador Sarek had insisted on giving him some sort of peace award. It seemed a strange thing to give a man who had spent the last two years robbing and killing people, but at least the Ambassador had merely conveyed his wife's regards and had made no personal comment.

Clifton had told himself that if anyone from the survival capsule was found alive he would try to come to terms with all that had happened. It was not that he wanted to give up, it was just that he couldn't think of anything he wanted to live for any more. But now he would have to think of the future.

He could take his back pay and settle on some nice ordinary planet away from pirates, Vulcans, and most of all, Commodore Briggs. He could lead a nice quiet life, and not even dream about T'Jill with her broken neck. T'Jill, who had been his last victim - or at least he hoped so...

He looked at the stars, those lights in the eternal darkness, and knew he would do no such thing. He was still a Starfleet officer. No more Security jobs, however. He'd apply for a nice small ship that was right for him, and this time he wasn't going to be sidetracked into not finding it...



SPOCK *xxx*

HUMAN to VULCAN

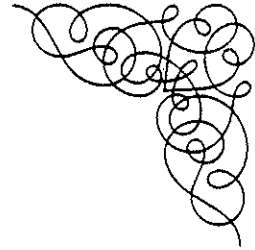
You would drive me from within you
For you think of me as weakness,
The unweighed, unknown element,
The enemy inside.
I am the stranger in your mind,
The tape that came unprogrammed,
The face behind the helmet
Of your armoured Vulcan pride.
Sometimes I think you fear me
Though you would never admit it.
"Illogical!" you mutter
In your icy Vulcan role.
But the fortress so impregnable
Can also be a prison.
I'm the unbarred gateway piercing
The high wall around your soul.
You hide me like some secret vice
That you must not show others',
Lock me away and out of sight,
Make sure I am not seen!
Your face becomes a stronghold
Holding love and life at bay there,
And only in unguarded moments
Do I slip between.
Don't keep me forever prisoner thus
Until I lie here rotting.
Trust me! Learn to understand!
See your world - but with *my* heart.
There are others waiting there
To lead me out if you will let them.
I am part of you forever, Vulcan,
Storming your ramparts.

Sheryl Peterson



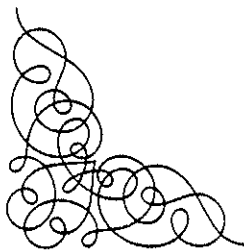


MISTRESSES



Dream, my lover,
 As your smile
 (The basis of a million broken hearts)
 Lights up the room.
 Let the fingers of your dreams
 Caress the darkness and light
 Of the infinity that is space.
 Trail your spirit through ebony black
 Answering the silent call of myriad
 twinkling stars.
 Your heart beats quicker as your mind
 sees what your soul desires,
 And in your sleep a hand reaches out
 as though...
 As though you might capture and hold forever
 the pulsating throb of the universe.
 Space will finally claim you -
 But until then, my love... dream.

I am your mistress, dark with glistening
 baubles
 That languish in my depths.
 Holding you captive, I can command you from
 afar.
 I smile quietly as I see you beckoning to me
 As you seek something intangible.
 What do you think I hide?
 Is there an answer in my depths?
 I am Space. I am your heart's desire.
 I am your siren, your swan song...
 And I shall be your funeral pyre.



Julie Thomson



WELCOME HOME



by

Ginna LaCroix

"Street light is different from starlight, isn't it?"

Spock's voice momentarily startled Kirk. He had been absorbed in the view of the city spread out far below where he stood, and had not heard Spock's approach. "But beautiful," he answered finally.

"Perhaps," Spock said, "in the way everything possesses its own beauty."

"In the eye of the beholder?" Kirk asked.

"More in the knowledge of the beholder," Spock said. He looked out the window. "You see the twinkling lights of a city, but is it truly beauty? Is beauty the man-made movement of electrons along a conductor...?"

"Has anyone ever told you that you're an expert at spoiling a mood?" Kirk interrupted.

Spock smiled slightly. "Frequently." He gestured upwards. "Man has managed to spoil much of what is beautiful, but he has yet to leave his mark in space. Electricity can never be starlight, for starlight shines with a natural light of its own, bright and blazing."

Kirk leaned back against the closed window, his head a little to one side, a smile on his face. It was rare for Spock to start a conversation concerning the abstract, especially like this when he did not appear the least bit uncomfortable with the situation. "You have something on your mind, Spock?"

The Vulcan took on an air of injured innocence. "Do I always need a reason for acting as I do?"

"Yes."

Spock's eyebrow lifted a little at Kirk's rather blunt answer. The Human knew him too well. He turned away from the window. "You appeared somewhat depressed at the briefing today."

"And you just happened to notice," Kirk said drily.

"Yes." Spock turned back but did not elaborate.

"I'm a big boy now, Spock. I am able to take care of myself."

Spock nodded slowly. "The Enterprise will not return for at least three weeks. This is not a good time to be alone, especially now that you have no family."

Again a slight smile touched Kirk's mouth. "I didn't know Vulcans experienced the loneliness of Christmas."

"Of Christmas, no," Spock replied, "but there is little I do not understand of loneliness. Jim," he said, walking forward a little, "I would be honoured if you would accompany me to Vulcan, to spend this time with my family."

It was Kirk's turn for the eyebrows to go up. "Since when did Vulcans celebrate Christmas?" he blurted out, and immediately regretted it. He had not meant the words to sound as they did.

Spock took no apparent offense. "The family is very important in our culture. We have a time, the A'talet, the Time of Gathering. It was during this time that my mother would celebrate the Earth custom of Christmas, what she called combining the best of both."

"I don't want to intrude," Kirk said dubiously. The ritual of Christmas was an uniquely family celebration; from what Spock had said, the A'talet must be even more so.

"It will be no intrusion. I have already contacted my parents and they are expecting you."

Kirk stood looking at the Vulcan. The few years they had known each other seemed to have stretched into a lifetime of familiarity, yet outside of the service life they shared, he still knew very little about his First Officer.

"If you would prefer to give my offer some thought, Captain..." Spock started hesitantly.

"Uh, no, sorry, I was daydreaming," Kirk said apologetically. "I would like to come, Spock, and even though I grumbled about it, I appreciate you worrying about me."

"Someone has to, Jim," Spock said, his expression serious. "You rarely do it for yourself."

Kirk found himself unaccountably nervous as the aircar flew across ShiKahr. He only half-listened as Spock pointed out the various attractions; all he saw was a blur of gardens and buildings. If he had been pressed to admit it, he felt like a little kid desperately trying to remember not-yet-familiar social manners. When he had met Spock's parents once before, he had been on the Enterprise and, as such, had been in command. Now he did not have Starfleet rules and regulations behind him and for some reason he felt out of his depth. Finally he became aware that Spock was staring at him. "Something wrong?" he asked.

"Not with me," Spock said with a slight smile. He seemed to understand Kirk's nervousness. "I was saying that once we've had a chance to rest and freshen up, we must go and obtain suitable clothing for you."

"I brought..."

"Jim," Spock said quietly, "when you accompanied me here to Koon-ut-kal-if-fee, it was deep into our cold season."

"Cold season?" Kirk echoed, his heart falling. He had almost

melted.

Spock nodded. "The nights at this time of year are pleasant for most Humans, but the average daytime temperature is 140 degrees. The clothing you favour would prove uncomfortable in such heat."

"Agreed," Kirk said fervently.

Spock smiled. "We will have several days to do as we wish, then the A'talet will begin."

Kirk shifted uncomfortably. "You'll have to tell me what to do, what is expected. I've never been the only Human in a large group of Vulcans."

Spock was about to answer when the aircar suddenly settled outside a large house. It was uniquely constructed on different levels in a combination of soft colours which made it look imposing yet appealing at the same time. In the confusion of paying the driver and collecting their luggage, the train of conversation was lost.

At the front door Spock placed his hand on a small circle and chimes sounded from deep within. After a few minutes the door opened, revealing Amanda.

"Spock!" she said with delight. She reached out and took his hand. Kirk could only guess at the control which stopped her from flinging her arms around her son. Still holding his hand, she turned to Kirk. "Captain Kirk, we are so pleased you could be with us."

Kirk bowed slightly, still feeling a little unsure of himself, but already more relaxed by Amanda's warm greeting. "Thank you," he said. "I was honoured to be asked."

Amanda threw a quick smile at her son, seeming to share something with him. "Do come in," she said. "You are not used to our climate, Captain. It is sure to be uncomfortable."

They walked forward into the cool depths of the house. It was beautifully decorated with quiet elegance.

"This is most impressive, Mrs. Sarek," Kirk said, looking around.

"I'll give you the grand tour later," Amanda said, "but for now I'm sure you would like to get freshened up. Spock, I've given Captain Kirk the room next to yours. I thought the two of you would be more content with those arrangements than having to be eternally running half an acre to the guest quarters."

"Uh, Mrs. Sarek," Kirk said, "maybe it would be better if you called me Jim. Somehow Captain Kirk seems out of place here."

She smiled. "Only if you promise to call me Amanda."

"We'll be down shortly, Mother," Spock said. "Would you happen to have any...?"

"Eacho juice? I haven't forgotten, Spock," she said fondly. She looked at Kirk. "Take your time. You've got two weeks to relax, and I expect both of you to do just that."

When Spock had washed and changed he wandered into Kirk's room, to find his Captain staring out the window.

"Spock, what's down there?" Kirk asked.

Spock glanced out at the almost obscured area. "It is a meditation garden," he said. "The closest description in Human terms would be a courtyard, an open area surrounded by the rest of the house. From all angles it is sheltered from observation. It is a place where one can go to find oneself."

Kirk looked around the large room, then back at Spock. "It is so peaceful here. It's hard to imagine how you could leave it."

"Peace is an illusion, Jim, as is much of life. Could you stay in such a place without eventually feeling tied down?"

"Probably not," Kirk agreed finally. "Restlessness seems to be born in us. No matter how beautiful the place, we seem destined to leave it." He moved away from the window, then turned to look at the Vulcan. "But it's here for you to come back to, Spock. Until you lose that security, it means little."

Kirk's pain stabbed through Spock. He walked forward and put his hands on Kirk's arms. "As it will always be here for you, Jim. Often it is not the place that is important, but the people."

"I'm not a Vulcan, Spock."

"No," Spock agreed, "but my parents understand the depth of our friendship." He flushed slightly, but did not hesitate. "They know what happened when you last accompanied me to Vulcan. It affected my father deeply, for he understands what pon farr can do. Then they met you aboard the Enterprise, and it only served to deepen his respect."

"And your mother?"

Spock's hands dropped. "My mother is a remarkable woman. She was not afraid to love my father, and because a Vulcan cannot change what he is, she remade herself to his likeness, and raised me in the same mould." He looked at Kirk. "She would love to have someone with whom she could share her Human self."

"I have the feeling I'm about to be adopted," said Kirk with a slight smile.

"The Vulcan family is small and closely knit for the most part," Spock said. "A rift such as I had with my father is most uncommon. That you are my friend is enough for my parents."

"It takes Humans longer, Spock."

"I know. Well, shall we go down? I know my mother is ready to pounce on you for her guided tour of the house. She is very proud of it, and it isn't often we have a guest where she can let that pride shine through."

"It is a beautiful home, Amanda," said Kirk as they left the outside gardens and returned to the coolness of the house. They were alone together, Spock having excused himself saying he already had extensive knowledge of the house, but really doing it so Amanda would feel no restraint and could be herself with one of her own kind.

"I'm pleased you like it," she said. "Now I think we'd better find something to drink. I'm parched, and I'm used to the heat! You were good to tag along through all my chattering!"

"I enjoyed it," Kirk protested. "Heaven knows I've dragged a lot of people through the Enterprise..."

"And your pride in her is exactly like mine with this house, I remember," Amanda said.

"Agreed," Kirk said softly.

She got them something to drink, then they moved to a small, dimly lit alcove. "My favourite place," she said with a smile. She sat down and took a sip of her drink. "Jim, I'd like to thank you for bringing Spock home."

Kirk looked surprised. "But he was the one who invited me!"

She shook her head. "He contacted me about you." She put her hand on Kirk's. "He told me about your mother when she died, and how you seemed to bury yourself in your work. I tried to assure him it was a normal Human reaction, but I don't think I convinced him. Then I got a stargram from him a few weeks ago asking if the two of you would be welcome for A'talet. He sounded even more worried about you than facing his father."

"Facing his father?"

She nodded. "Spock has not been home since before you took command of the Enterprise, almost five years now, and his infrequent visits before that were not pleasant for him. Now, thanks to you, Spock and his father are at least speaking to each other. Perhaps this visit will heal the last of the rift between them."

"I hope so," said Kirk with a smile. "I shared so much with my father; it hurts to know Spock's missed that."

Amanda nodded as she looked at Kirk. "Jim, I don't mean to pry, but if you ever need anyone to talk to..."

Kirk's eyebrows rose a little, and Amanda flushed. "I'm probably talking out of turn, but I meant what I said before. Spock is worried about you, and I've learned to trust his instincts. He has the ability to look outside himself at what others are experiencing, without his own feelings clouding what he sees. This is the time of year all of us get wrapped up with whatever memories the particular event has for us. Sometimes we need something more than a friend..."

Kirk found his eyes filling up with the tears he had not shed when his mother died, and he looked down at the drink in his hand to cover them. "Thank you," he said finally in a voice that didn't sound like his own.

Amanda squeezed his arm. "Spock's probably up in his room. He said something about taking you shopping. I must see to dinner."

Kirk sat by himself for a few minutes, the pain in his throat gradually fading. Amanda had been right. Ever since his mother's death he had plunged into hard and increasingly dangerous work, never allowing himself a spare minute to think of anything but the present. All that time Spock had stood at his side and worried. Would he ever really know the enigma he called a friend? Finally he stood up. Spock would be waiting for him.

Kirk looked at himself in the floor-length robe. "I feel a little silly," he said, turning to Spock.

Spock looked at the dark blue aklest with its interwoven gold threads matching the flecks of gold in Kirk's eyes. "It is a most appropriate choice for the A'talet, Jim."

"Well, it is comfortable," Kirk admitted, "and cool. Well, if everyone else will be wearing something like it, I guess a dress uniform would be out of place."

"Not at all," Spock said. "The dress uniform represents that which you are. It is one of the purposes of clothing."

Kirk glanced at him. "But you think I'm more like this."

"It is how I see you," Spock admitted.

"Okay," Kirk said, "then this is what I'll wear. Come on, we'd better get out of here before I purchase the whole store!"

"We'll have the clothing delivered to the house," Spock said, "otherwise we'll be buried under packages. Why don't you wear these?" he suggested, lifting up a lightweight outfit. "We'll send your clothes with the new purchases. You'll be more comfortable."

Kirk and Spock spent the rest of the afternoon wandering through Shikahr's equivalent of a museum of ancient history. Kirk was fascinated with Spock's description of pre-reform Vulcan and all it represented. Spock also seemed to know everyone at the museum, and they received most deferential treatment.

"The name of James Kirk is not unknown among our people," Spock commented as they walked down the long tier of steps leading out of the museum.

"Me?" Kirk said in surprise. "I thought they were being polite to you!"

Spock almost smiled at Kirk's reaction, but the knowledge of where he was stopped him. "On Vulcan, I am accorded the respect due my family. You are a distinguished visitor."

"I didn't think Vulcans approved of modern warriors," Kirk countered.

"They know of you as a representative of the Federation who is not afraid to defend his beliefs. That is far more than a warrior." They walked to the aircar. "Shall I take you on a tour of the city?" Spock asked.

"Are you implying I didn't really see much on the way in from the spaceport?" Kirk asked with a grin.

"You did appear somewhat distracted," Spock replied. "I give a fairly good tour, perhaps not as emotional as my mother's, but it might suffice."

Kirk looked at him for a moment. "Has my behaviour been so erratic that you felt I needed your mother's shoulder to cry on?" he asked.

"On the contrary," Spock said, not seeming in the least surprised at the sudden change of subject. "You behave no differently now than when I first met you."

"Then why did you bring me to Vulcan?"

Spock looked around. "Perhaps we should continue this conversation while we tour the city. Unlike most races, Vulcans are not in the habit of eavesdropping, but I think this subject would be best discussed in more private surroundings."

For a while they toured Shikahr, Spock pointing out once again the most popular sites, until Kirk thought he intended to avoid reopening the discussion they had started outside the museum. Finally they left the city and flew out over the vast but somehow beautiful desert area.

"To continue our conversation," Spock said once he could fly the aircar without the necessary concentration required in the city's more crowded airspace, "you seem perplexed by my invitation."

"It was more something your mother offered me."

Spock smiled slightly. "Until I met you, I did not appreciate my mother as I should have done. Trust what she told you, Jim. She is a very wise woman."

"She said as much about you." He looked at Spock. "You seem to have summed up my life's more crushing events to her."

"Are you annoyed that I did?" Spock asked.

"Not really. I'm more surprised that you'd notice, or at least I was until I talked with Amanda."

"I told you back at the base that I understood loneliness," Spock said slowly. "I had lived with it all my life. Until I met you, I thought that was all life was." He fell silent for a moment. "Because of that, I suppose I tend to see it in others."

"And I'm lonely?"

"More lost than lonely," Spock said.

Kirk looked down at his hands. "Time does heal, Spock," he said quietly. "I've had more than enough opportunity to learn that."

"Agreed, but until now a piece of your family has always been there. There was a great deal of security in knowing your mother and your home were back on Earth, always waiting for you with open arms, always willing to accept you as you really are, not just how others perceived you to be." He looked over to see Kirk's knuckles white

from the pressure of his clenched hands. He reached out and put his hand on top of the tight fists.

"I do not mean for the truth to hurt so, but it does," he said softly. "I asked you to come here because I wanted you to know you had a place to go. As much as you have given me a reason for living, offering a second family is very little in return." He paused for a moment. "Accept it if you can, Jim, but no-one will force you. I just want you to understand that we are here if you want us." When Kirk still didn't answer, he swung the aircar around. "We'd better get home. My father will be back by now."

"I apologise for putting you into an awkward situation," Kirk said, finally looking up.

"An awkward situation?" Spock asked.

"Amanda said you have not been home for a while."

Spock shrugged. "I believe the reason for that has passed."

"I hope so," Kirk said. "Every son should have the opportunity to know his father as a person, not just the authority figure who raised him."

"Perhaps," Spock said noncommittally.

"Captain Kirk, welcome to our home!" Sarek strode across the open hallway as Spock and Kirk let themselves in.

"Thank you, Ambassador," said Kirk with a smile, a feeling of warmth going through him. It really sounded as if Sarek was pleased to see him.

Sarek turned to Spock, who was standing slightly behind Kirk, as he always did. "Live long and prosper, Spock."

"Peace and long life, Father."

For a minute they stood looking at each other, then Sarek broke the silence. "It is good to have you here, Spock. It has been too long."

Spock nodded. "Indeed."

"Oh Spock, Jim!" came Amanda's voice. "Your parcels arrived a while ago. Is there any merchandise left in the store?"

Kirk flushed slightly. "I'm afraid I got carried away."

Amanda laughed. "I hope it means you're planning to come back again. Now you two boys scoot upstairs and wash. Dinner's ready."

"Mother," Spock said in an insulted voice, "we are hardly children. The Captain and I..."

"You are my son, Spock, and you know I shall always see the little boy in you. And..." she grinned mischievously, "Jim has a dirty face..."

Kirk was mortified, and knew he was blushing harder.

"I've told your father to clean the grease off the aircar door before yet another person puts his hand on it and then gets grease on his face or clothing. Obviously he has yet to do anything about it."

It was Sarek's turn to look uncomfortable. "I was going to, Amanda..."

"Going to isn't good enough," said Amanda briskly. "Well, get a move on, everyone, or dinner is going to spoil."

Kirk knew that the Vulcan meal was normally eaten in silence, so was surprised when a lively conversation ensued.

"Too many years in the diplomatic service," explained Sarek with the ghost of a smile touching his face. "Valuable time can be wasted while eating. I learned years ago what the combination of good food and drink can do to a conversation. I seem to have brought that habit into this house."

"A good thing too," Amanda said. "I still find it torture to sit for hours through a silent meal. I'm always afraid I'm going to dump my plate upside down into my lap or something." She laughed softly as she glanced at Kirk. "On Vulcan, that kind of faux pas can be grounds for divorce!"

After desert, they moved to a smallish room full of deep, comfortable chairs. Amanda put her hand on Kirk's shoulder.

"If you'll excuse us, Jim, I have a little shopping to do, and I've tricked Spock into coming with me. He felt you might be tired from trying to cope with this hot, thin atmosphere of ours, and would be more comfortable staying here."

Kirk was grateful for Spock's suggestion. He was absolutely exhausted.

"Would you like some coffee, Captain?" Sarek asked after the others had left.

"I'll have whatever you're drinking, sir," Kirk said politely.

Sarek's eyebrows rose in a duplicate of his son's reaction. "Very well," he said, "but I would recommend sipping it slowly." He handed Kirk a small glass of smokey grey liquid. "Tashir," he said.

A second later Kirk no longer felt tired. He was hard put not to go flying around the room. "It leaves quite an impression," he managed finally.

Sarek smiled slightly. "Most people say that." He looked around. "Spock has mentioned you have a fondness for chess, Captain. Would you accept a friendly challenge?"

"I'm sure Spock's also mentioned my somewhat illogical approach."

"He has not played as many Humans as I have," Sarek said. "He still finds it surprising when a mind does not solely contain logic."

They moved to a small antique set standing in the corner. "This is beautiful!" Kirk breathed.

"Yes," Sarek said quietly. "I found it on Earth some years

ago. It was in poor condition, and one of the kings is missing, as you can see..." He pointed to a modern piece sitting in the midst of the others. "Spock and I played often..."

"I shall try to give you a contest," Kirk said as they sat down.

They started slowly, taking time to plot their moves carefully. Every now and then Kirk would take a sip of Tashir and feel his hair slowly stand on end, but he couldn't deny the pleasant effect it was having on him.

"I'm pleased you were able to accept Spock's invitation to join us at A'talet," Sarek said finally.

"I was honoured to be asked," Kirk replied.

Sarek looked at him. "You mean a great deal to my son, Captain. Because of that, you mean much to us." He looked at Kirk's last move and his eyebrow went up, changing Kirk's emotions from embarrassment to a horrible suspicion that he had just done something awful.

"That is kind of you to say, sir," he said.

Sarek glanced at him for a moment, then returned his attention to the board. Kirk stopped himself from fidgeting by taking another sip of Tashir. By the time he regained control it was his turn.

"Amanda has told me of the death of your mother. Please accept my sympathy, it is a painful experience. As I understand it, she was not of space."

Kirk gazed at the board. "No, she hated it. It took her family, killing her husband and older son." He glanced up at Sarek. "She did not inflict that on me. It was a private hurt she kept to herself."

Sarek nodded. "The strong always do." He watched as Kirk moved, and this time both eyebrows went up. He studied the board for a long time, then looked at Kirk without moving any of his pieces.

"The home is a most important place," he said, "yet I mistakenly drove my son away, and came very close to destroying my wife because of it..."

Kirk held his breath. Spock had often told him of the passion Vulcans had for privacy. He felt like an intruder.

"You were the one who brought us back together. We owe you more than it is possible to repay." He finally made a move on the board. "Spock told his mother you have lost your family..." He leaned back in his chair. "We cannot replace that loss, Captain, but if you would consider a substitute, you will always be welcome here."

Kirk had no idea how to answer. He had been somewhat surprised by Amanda's words, but now he was floored. Mistakenly he took a large gulp of Tashir and nearly blew off the top of his head. Sarek gave him some water after he had finished pounding him on the back.

"Thank you," Kirk managed weakly, not sure if he was answering for the water or the offer. Without paying any attention to what he was doing, he reached out and moved one of his chess pieces.

For a long time they sat in silence, Sarek studying the board and Kirk trying to catch his breath.

"I concede," Sarek said finally.

"What?" Kirk said.

"However I move, you appear to have me in checkmate. I concur with Spock's appraisal of your playing methods, Captain. Totally illogical."

That night Kirk found himself unable to sleep. He decided to go for a walk in the meditation garden. It would be cool, and he had already felt its tranquillity when he had been there earlier with Amanda.

He walked for a long time, disturbed by old memories, unsure of what the future held. Finally he became aware of another person. Amanda had quietly joined him.

"I hope you don't mind," she said. "I knew it was you out here. Vulcans don't pace."

"And Humans need company?" Kirk said.

"Or companionship, someone to talk with who understands. Spock says you are in a difficult position. A Starship Captain can have few close friends around him. It makes it difficult when you need that special someone; when you need to talk."

They walked in silence for a while, then Kirk turned to her. "I didn't cry for her, Amanda. I didn't cry for her or my father or my brother."

"Do you know why?" she asked gently.

"I didn't have time, I guess. There was always something else to be done."

"Or you wouldn't give yourself time." She put her arm around his waist as they started walking again. "It's not necessary to cry for the dead, Jim. Sometimes it's more important to cry for the living. They had the life they wanted. If you feel you must cry, do it for what you've lost, but don't cry for them."

"It's taken me years to build up this much guilt," Kirk said finally. "Then when my mother died, it became almost overwhelming when I found I couldn't cry for her either. Now you are walking at my side trying to wash it all away..."

Amanda smiled. "That's what mothers are for," she said. "I'm sure yours would have said exactly the same thing if you had ever talked to her about it. That can be part of the problem," she added. "We can often talk to others, but not to those we love most." She stopped and put both her hands on Kirk's shoulders. "Be happy, Jim, there is no reason to be otherwise." She kissed him on the cheek. "Well, I must be off to bed. I've got a lot to do the next few days."

Kirk walked for a little while longer, thinking about what Amanda had said. Finally he stopped and looked at the dark house, an

idea forming in his mind. He went inside and spent a long time on the interplanetary communications relay, then slept the first restful sleep he had had in months.

The next few days were spent in frantic activity, getting ready for the A'talet. Kirk was caught up in the anticipation, and the house gradually became spruced up with the special symbols used for the occasion.

"All right," said Amanda one day, "you boys go out and get the tree."

"Tree?" Kirk asked, looking at Spock.

"Tree," Sarek said. "For years I have tried to explain to my wife that a fir tree native to the planet Earth does not exist on Vulcan."

"And for years he's always come home with one," Amanda said. "Now get going!"

Sarek accompanied them on their trip. "Sonan will be expecting us," he said from the back seat of the aircar. "Once a year he has a tree brought from Earth. He humours what he feels to be an eccentricity on my part."

"I take it he doesn't know about Christmas," Kirk said.

"Oh, he knows the concept of the Christian religion," Sarek said, "but I fear he would not understand the other. Actually, I've never explained the purpose for which I want the tree."

Kirk and Spock looked at each other. The action spoke of Sarek's love for Amanda.

That evening they trimmed the tree and Kirk was taken back to his childhood. All the ornaments were centuries old, having been passed down through the generations of Amanda's family. The final touch came when the tiny candles were nestled in the branches, their flickering flames accenting the beauty of the tree.

For a long time they sat looking at it, then Amanda softly began to sing a Christmas carol Kirk had long forgotten. It was not one of the boisterous ones that was heard on the Enterprise, but one of legend and love. Hesitantly he started to sing with her, eventually to be joined by Spock and Sarek. When they had finished she started another, coming to sit on the arm of Kirk's chair and putting her arm around his shoulders; and as a family they sang of ages past and the eternal hope for the future.

"We are not a planet with a large population, Jim," Spock said, smiling at Kirk's rather bewildered expression. "Most Vulcans are related to one another in some way." They were standing at the main entrance, having said goodnight to the last of a multitude of guests.

"I was doing all right until T'Pau walked in," Kirk said. "I think your father must have noticed my expression - he handed me a glass of Tashir."

"Being a diplomat, he is often aware of the feelings of others," Spock agreed. "You impressed T'Pol, as you did all the others, in your Akleet."

Kirk looked down at his robe. "I'm glad you suggested I buy it. I would have stuck out like a sore thumb in my uniform."

"Hardly that," Spock said. "Come, it is time to share with the family."

"Presents?" Kirk asked.

Spock nodded.

"Hang on, I'll be right back." Kirk went up the stairs two at a time and grabbed some packages that had arrived the day before.

Kirk knew from the little Spock had told him that Vulcans did not go overboard with gifts, but each one meant something very special. He sat on the floor with Spock, the candles flickering on the tree behind him, and stared at the tiny plate in his hand. It was the code key for Sarek's house, his gift as a member of the family. They truly wanted him to consider it his home. He had tried to say what he felt, but had failed miserably. However, they all seemed to understand.

He looked around as the others started opening his presents to them. Spock was gazing at a painting he held in his lap, then he looked up at Kirk.

"My ancestors, Spock," Kirk said quietly. "Warriors, as were yours."

Spock nodded as he looked back down at the painting. "I recognise the American Indian, and the ritual of becoming blood brothers." Their eyes met again.

"Not born in blood," Kirk said, "but making the commitment in life, just as we have."

"Agreed," Spock said.

"Captain!" came Sarek's voice. All eyes turned to him as he held out a delicately carved chess piece. "It is exact!" he continued as he turned the king in his hands. "Where? How?" He looked at Kirk.

"You may not be as happy when your next interplanetary communications bill arrives," said Kirk with a grin. "I tried to have it transferred to my code, but I'm not sure how successful I was, and it took me a very long time on the call to Earth to describe exactly what I wanted."

"For this I would gladly pay anything," Sarek said. "I can't thank you enough!"

"I'm almost afraid to open my present," Amanda said with a laugh. "You've already managed to get two Vulcans crying." She opened the box and sat speechless, then carefully lifted the figurine out into the open. It was an exquisite statue of a mother standing with her arm around her child, and the child was hugging close. The features of each were so beautifully detailed that there was no missing the love. She looked at Kirk, still unable to say anything.

"No-one can replace the loss," Kirk said softly, glancing at Sarek and Spock, then back to her, "but you were right, Amanda. Sometimes we do need something more than a friend..."

She joined him on the floor and hugged him close. "Now you've got all of us crying," she said through her tears. "Welcome home, Jim."



TOGETHER

Yesterday, when I was young,
I was an alien among my own people.
Like a black cloak I wore my loneliness,
And so, unknowing, I hid behind my newborn logic,
And Science was the only friend I knew.
But I also knew that there *had* to be more...
Just what that could be I could not fathom.

For many pain-filled years I lived a dream.
All I lived for was the dream's realisation, until
The stars called to me - and I answered.
Out into the unknown I went - and met myself.
It took time, but I *did* find the other half of me.
I am completed, and my life is... happy.

But I cannot help fear for the future searing my soul!
What will I do if I ever lose you? My soul will die
with you...

But you must never know how it is. The life we lead
Is hazardous enough without my giving you anything else
to worry about.

So I pretend, and hide again, even though subconsciously
I realise you know it all.

Your smile and your Human touch tell me
That there is no need for words between us.

So we both hide our fears and suffer,
Content that just having each other is enough.
We take each day as it comes,
Both knowing that together we can face all adversity.



Karen Hayden
and
Elizabeth Rackel

LEAVING HOME

by

Janice Pitkethley

Spock looked at the completed forms in the folder lying on top of the desk. They seemed to stare accusingly at him. Some time ago he had applied to join Starfleet, instead of the Science Academy as Sarek wanted him to do. Back had come the forms of acceptance. Spock knew he could not delay telling his parents any longer - he was due to leave in a few days' time.

Putting the forms back in the drawer, Spock left his room and made his way downstairs. Sarek and Amanda looked up as he entered.

"I... wish to speak to you," he began. "It concerns my career. I have been accepted for Starfleet."

At once Sarek stiffened, his upswept brows drawing into a frown of extreme disapproval. "You have chosen your career, Spock. You will enter the Science Academy, as I did and my father before me."

"Father, I wish to enter Starfleet..."

"You speak against me?" Sarek rose to his feet. "Remember you are still a minor, Spock. The matter is closed."

"No, let him speak," Amanda interrupted. "I would like his reasons for this to be known."

"I am half Human. I am still not fully accepted on Vulcan because of that. Starfleet offers security, and a chance to develop scientific skills regardless of race."

"Starfleet is a unit of force." Sarek's voice was icy cold now. "Contrary to the Vulcan belief that diversity should not be controlled by force."

Amanda kept silent, looking at her husband and son. She knew by Sarek's rigid stance that he was extremely displeased, and Spock had a defiant look in his eyes. Neither would give in; they were both stubborn.

"You bring dishonour to our family. I trained you well to our heritage, and now you wish to leave Vulcan."

"Father, I believe that a scientist has a greater opportunity to study the universe in Starfleet than at the Vulcan Science Academy."

Sarek was totally opposed to Spock joining Starfleet, so much so that he began to speak openly, disregarding the fact that Amanda was present.

"You can study the universe... Have you thought of the future? You are bonded, and after the Starfleet Academy you will be assigned

to a ship."

"Father..." Spock tried to interrupt when he realised his father's train of thought, but Sarek could not be silenced.

"You are young, but heed my warning, Spock. The ship could be in some far sector of the galaxy when you enter Pon Farr for the first time. You would die because of Vulcan being too far away for you to reach."

There was a gasp of astonishment from Amanda at Sarek's directness; never before had she heard him speak in this way. She too was aware of the risks involved, but would never dare mention the subject. Her cheeks flamed.

"It is illogical to place your life in danger," Sarek went on. "The Captain of the ship will have to comply with the orders of his own superiors. He could not divert from his course just to bring you to Vulcan. The odds are greatly against you, Spock. Do you wish to die in Pon Farr? Do you wish to end your life needlessly?"

"I am prepared, Father." Spock stared back at Sarek. Amanda fled from the room in tears.

"So be it." Sarek turned and left without a backward glance.

Spock went to his room with a heavy heart. His parents' reaction had been worse than he had expected. The forms still lay in the drawer, and for a moment he was tempted to tear them up. He quickly closed the drawer as Amanda burst into the room without knocking. It disturbed Spock to see his mother crying.

"I know I can't persuade you to change your mind." She at least tried hard to stop the tears, and her own feeling of sadness. "I don't want to lose you, whatever the reason."

Spock tried not to recoil from the contact as she put her arms around him.

"I know you want to make a career in Starfleet. Perhaps you will be happier there. Come on - I will help you to get your things ready." Amanda wiped her eyes and tried to smile.

"Thank you."

Spock did not have much to take with him as Starfleet was a uniformed service. He packed a few books and some personal things he could not bear to leave behind - illogical, but true.

Amanda accepted the fact that her son was leaving home, but Sarek did not. During the last remaining days before Spock's departure, father and son avoided each other, not speaking.

On the day of departure Spock left for the spaceport alone. Sarek did not emerge from his study, where he had stayed all morning. Amanda could not trust herself to go to the spaceport with her son; she knew she would be crying in front of everyone when they called the shuttle flight.

She accompanied him to the gateway, her tears threatening to come at any moment. "Take care, Spock." She threw her arms around

him, crying now. "I only want you to be happy. Remember and keep in touch with us. I only wish it could have been different, and not this way between your father and you."

"That is understandable. I have gone against his wishes, but I have to do this."

"I know. Goodbye, Spock. I love you, and I'll miss you..."

"Goodbye, Mother..."

Blinded by tears, Amanda watched as he picked up his one small case and walked through the gateway and out of sight. The house would be silent and empty now...



FEAR in my HEART



The transporter effect took longer
Than I had ever thought possible,
And I had to stand there, helpless, outwardly calm,
Knowing that you had been hurt,
But not knowing how badly...

McCoy, like me, fearful
That medical miracles would not work - this time.
Perhaps we would find that Lady Luck
Had finally left your - and our - side.

Finally, you were there, though in great pain,
Your gold-clad figure bathed in red.
But your hazel eyes searched for me, found me,
Eager to tell me that all *would* be well.

Numb, I watched as McCoy hurried to your side,
And took over from the red-clad men
Who had brought you home to me - to us,
And as he ushered you out
He spared the time to tell me,
"Jim will live."
And in that moment I knew that so would I.



Karen Hayden

ACADEMY DAYS

by

Janice Pitkethley

Spock stood in the Principal's office, waiting as the Admiral checked his papers and qualifications from Vulcan.

"All is in order." The Admiral looked at the young cadet. "This is the first time we have had a Vulcan at Starfleet Academy. Welcome, Spock. We hope you will do well here. I will get someone to show you to your quarters."

Spock followed one of the seniors to the residential building.

"Here we are. Room number 409. You will be sharing with three of your classmates."

Spock stood in the middle of the room with his suitcase in his hand, looking around. The room was spacious, with a working area and sleeping quarters. One of the lockers bore his name, and on opening it he found it contained several uniforms.

He unpacked his case and changed into uniform; it fitted perfectly. Spock walked through to the other section of the quarters and stood in front of the full-length mirror to see what he looked like in Starfleet uniform. It felt and looked a bit strange after the cool garments of Vulcan, but he was grateful for the heaviness of the material as it was cold here.

Satisfied with his appearance, he turned his attention to the rest of the quarters, opening doors and looking inside. How different it all was from Vulcan. His sharp sense of hearing caught the sound of approaching voices, and he moved into the main quarters just as the door opened and three cadets came in.

"Hi! We're your room-mates..." The first cadet's mouth dropped open in astonishment. "You... you're a Vulcan!"

"I am Spock."

"I'm Steve, this is Karl, and he's Alistair - Al for short. I'm Canadian, Karl's German, and Al is Scottish," he introduced himself and the other two. "What did you say your name was?"

"Spock."

"Well, I see you've already found your locker." Steve threw his books on one of the beds. "Wow! Was that instructor ever crabby today! He bawled me out for getting my warp-drive wrong. Oh by the way, that's your bed over there, Spock."

Somehow his new friends reminded Spock of his cousins Dave and Gary; their manner and expressions were similar.



"We were wondering who our new room-mate would be. I've never met a Vulcan before."

"Neither have we," came from the other two.

"You'll soon get used to us, Spock. They say that Room 409 is the craziest in the whole Academy," Al laughed.

"Is it true that you have no emotion - that you can't laugh or anything?"

"That is correct."

"One of our lectures was about Vulcan," Al continued. "We didn't believe half of it, but now I'm not so sure."

Lessons were over for the day, and the boys took Spock to the rec room. The noisy talk and laughter stopped as soon as they walked in the door. Hundreds of eyes followed Spock as he approached the food selector. As he carried his tray to the table he heard the usual whispers.

"He's a Vulcan..."

"... we never had one here before..."

"... look at those ears..."

Spock was hungry and turned his attention to the food tray, ignoring the comments.

After they had eaten some other cadets came over to talk to them, asking Spock many questions. Someone strummed a guitar, singing softly while others played different board games. This was all new to Spock - he looked around with interest as the boys played with strange square things with markings and figures on them.

"What are those?" he asked.

"We're playing cards. Have you never seen them before?"

Everyone laughed when Spock admitted he had not. "I know how to play chess," he informed them.

One of the seniors challenged him to a game. The guy was a bit of a bighead and a bully, full of his own importance; the rest of the cadets cheered when Spock beat him in a few moves.

"Good work, Spock!" His room-mates slapped him on the back. "That guy needed taking down."

Something told Spock he would always have to look out for the arrogant Kyle - he could not be trusted.

"Beginner's luck, Vulcan!" the defeated bighead threw at Spock as he left.

"C'mon, Spock," Steve yawned. "Guess you must be tired, too. Tomorrow begins your first day at the Academy."

It took Spock a long time to fall asleep in the strange surroundings, especially when the other three were there. He had never shared a room before.

Karl couldn't sleep either. Sighing, he turned over and adjusted the pillow. He let out a yelp of fright, waking the other two.

"What's going on, you idiot?"

"L-look..." Karl pointed with a shaking hand at Spock's bed. The other two almost cried out with fright as well - Spock seemed to be looking straight at them, the wide-open, unblinking eyes giving them the creeps. Alistair went over and shook him. Spock blinked twice and turned his head.

"What is it? Why have you awakened me?"

"We... we thought there was something wrong. You were just lying there, staring..."

"My apologies. I omitted to inform you that a Vulcan sleeps with the eyes open," Spock replied, sitting up now.

"Huh? What else is different about you?"

"Guess we'll find out soon enough. Come on, you guys! I'm tired." Steve pulled the blankets over his head.

A loud buzz brought Spock to instant wakefulness. It was the alarm call to waken them to get ready for classes. The wall chronometer read 7 a.m.

The boys jostled each other, laughing as they got ready. Alistair threw soap at Steve, then they turned one of the showers to freezing, causing Karl to yell as the jets turned almost to ice. Spock watched all this horseplay with something close to astonishment, his eyebrows threatening to disappear into his hairline as Steve threw Al's uniform out into the corridor.

"Get a move on, Spock, or you'll be late for classes," Al warned as Spock just stood there looking at them.

"Guess he's not used to our crazy behaviour. It's okay, Spock, we won't do anything to you."

"Why do you act like that?" Spock asked when they were seated in the rec room with their breakfast trays.

"Well, it's just fun," Karl replied. "You wouldn't understand."

The day's classes passed very quickly. The instructors were interested in Spock's knowledge of computers, especially when he informed them that he had turned down a post at the Vulcan Science Academy to join Starfleet.

"I will recommend that you be transferred to classes dealing with the Sciences Section. You are more suited to that department." The instructor realised that the Vulcan's intelligence was much higher than that of the rest of the class. They looked enviously at Spock - here he was being transferred to a higher grade on his higher intelligence level.

That night Spock went off on his own to explore the rest of the recreation area. He looked in at a bowling alley, wondering what it

was. The next block housed a gymnasium and a swimming pool. This was more interesting! Spock decided to return to his quarters down in the residential building and bring his swim things - they were provided by the Academy along with the uniform.

He loved to swim, but did not get much chance on Vulcan, where water was considered too precious to waste on filling a pool. It felt good as he travelled the length of the pool with powerful strokes. After a while he climbed out and sat down on one of the poolside chairs. The heat from the overhead solarium was pleasant, and he felt warm for the first time since arriving at the Academy. Spock's idling thoughts were rudely interrupted by the arrival of Kyle and some of his followers.

"Look who's here!" Kyle sneered, deliberately bumping into Spock's chair. "He swims with those ears," he informed his friends. They all laughed.

Kyle was a real show-off, liking to be the centre of attraction. He flexed the muscles of his powerful chest and arms, looking contemptuously at Spock.

"God, you're skinny," he boasted. "Do you swim like a stick as well? Let's see..."

Before Spock could move, Kyle had flung him over the side and into the water, chair and all.

"Why did you do that?" Spock asked, surfacing.

"Because I felt like it - *Vulcan!*"

"That is illogical."

"Huh! Logic!" Kyle sneered. "You're a computer. Go on, let's see you swim!" He grabbed one of Spock's ears.

That did it. Spock took hold of Kyle's shoulders and forced his head under the water. Bubbles rose to the surface as Kyle fought to free himself from the Vulcan's vice-like grip.

"Have you had enough?" Spock asked as Kyle lay on the poolside, gasping for breath like a stranded fish.

"I'll get you for this, Vulcan!" he threatened."

"Threats are illogical," Spock answered, heading towards the changing room. He thought about the incident while dressing, realising that in Kyle he had made a deadly enemy. Later that night he told his room-mates what had happened.

"I would have loved to have been there," Steve laughed. "That guy thinks he owns the place. You really sorted him out..."

The weeks passed. By now Spock was used to the way of life at Starfleet Academy, the military style of discipline, the lectures and classes, the shared quarters. Sometimes the boys played a practical joke on him, and he learned not to take it seriously, and even returned them on occasions.

Amanda kept on writing regularly, but there was no word from

Sarek. This still troubled Spock a lot; he wished he could hear from his father - it had been so long now.

The months passed into a year, then two. Spock was a senior now, and the arrogant Kyle had not bothered him for months. He had been posted to serve on a scoutship - one more troublemaker out of the way.

When it came time for the yearly leaves, Spock remained at the Academy, studying. What use was leave to him? He had nowhere to go... He spent almost all his spare time in study, until by the final year he had gained the highest awards the Academy could give.

Then one morning he was called to the Principal's office. There were two men with the Admiral, Spock's class instructor and another man in a Captain's uniform.

"Come in, Spock," the Admiral smiled. "We are here to discuss your future."

Spock looked at the uniformed Captain and then at the Admiral, wondering what was going on. The Captain was a tall man with dark hair and a kind and also determined face. Instinctively, Spock knew that this man was a leader.

The Admiral began to speak again. "We offer you a teaching post here at the Academy. You would be of great assistance to us with all your knowledge. Would you consider it?"

"Sir, I wish to enter active service," Spock stated without hesitation.

"I expected that." He indicated the uniformed stranger. "This is Captain Pike, Christopher Pike. He has examined all your qualifications and is very interested in you, Spock. We anticipated you would turn down the teaching post. We assign you to the Science department of the Starship Enterprise, the newest and finest ship in our Fleet, under the command of Captain Christopher Pike." The Admiral smiled and shook Spock's hand. "Congratulations, Spock. You are the first ever cadet to be assigned to a Starship."

"Welcome, Mr. Spock," Captain Pike also congratulated the young Vulcan. "I have heard a lot about you. I'm sure we will make a good team."

A Starship... Spock could hardly believe it. The Enterprise was the newest and most powerful of all the ships in Starfleet.

The news spread round the Academy like wildfire. People who had never before spoken to Spock came over to offer their congratulations. His room-mates were really proud of his success, and just a little bit envious.

"A Starship..." Steve sighed as they sat in their quarters for the last time. "We'll be lucky to be assigned to some old rustbucket of a freighter or something."

The boys watched as Spock packed his personal belongings.

"We'll miss you..." they said as he closed the case.

"Bye, Spock..." They went to the door with him as the summons came.

Spock looked round the quarters for the last time; they had been home to him for the last three years.

"Thank you," he said to his three room-mates. "You accepted me as I am. Many would not. You have been friends to me."

"Forget it." Steve looked at the alien face. "We soon got used to you - we even taught you how to return a practical joke..."

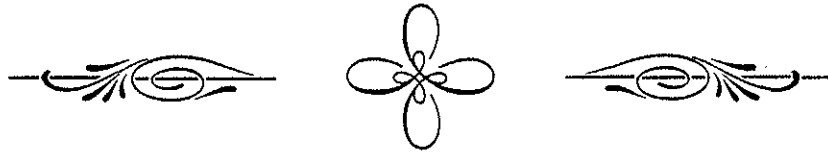
"Farewell." Spock raised his hand, fingers parted in the Vulcan salute. Picking up his suitcase he walked down the corridor, the turbolift doors closing behind him. He walked towards the Principal's office, and Captain Pike.

A new chapter in his life had begun...

POSTSCRIPT

We all know very well the events which follow. After Captain Pike's promotion there are some changes aboard the Enterprise. Spock welcomes the new Captain, James T. Kirk...

The rest? Well, the adventures of the USS Enterprise and her crew are known and loved world-wide...



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I close my eyes
and dream once more
about my wife
Miramanee.
Words cannot tell
what you meant to me,
Miramanee.
In my dream
I can see
your big brown eyes
looking down at me.
Oh Miramanee!
Words cannot tell
how I grieve for you.
It was because of me
you died,
our unborn child with you.
Your last words
still ring clear...
Each kiss is like the first...
Miramanee,
how I loved you
so.



A LITTLE LESS ME,



A LITTLE MORE YOU

by

Alinda Alain

An Alternate Universe story based on ST:IMP

He awoke, trembling.

A quick, thorough check of self revealed no physical difficulties. A deeper check showed the mental self also to be undisturbed.

At least...

His own mental and physical self was as it should be.

Then what had awakened him - and caused the trembling?

Curious, he marshalled the strict mental disciplines which he had spent the last eighteen seasons mastering.

Shortly thereafter, he had his answer.

"Spock." T'Sai, the High Master of Vulcan's greatest discipline, the Kolinahr, addressed him as he stood before her. "Thee are disturbed?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"By what?"

"A part of my former life that I believed ended calls to me."

"Your T'hy'la?"

He lifted an eyebrow, surprised at her perceptiveness. "Yes."

There was a long moment of silence, then, "Thee are free to go to him, if it is your wish to do so," T'Sai told him.

"Leave Gol... I am a Master. Is it so permitted?" he questioned.

"Thee are free to go if it is your wish," the High Master repeated, and moved away to resume her meditation.

Commanding Admiral Heihachiro Nogura paced back and forth before the entrance to Fleet Headquarters intensive care medical unit. The doors suddenly slid aside and a bearded man with greying black hair

and intense blue eyes stepped into the corridor.

"Medical report, Dr. McCoy," Nogura demanded immediately.

"Unchanged. He's still comatose," McCoy answered.

"But why?" Nogura said in frustration. "All the physical damage from the crash has been repaired. Why won't he wake up?"

"I don't know, Admiral." The doctor drew a deep breath, the weariness and frustration having finally caught up with him. "I really don't know."

"He's been in a coma for two weeks, and this planet's best medical minds don't know why, or how to break it." Nogura's tone was one of disgust.

McCoy's blue eyes favoured the Admiral with a look of measuring disdain - an expression Nogura read clearly.

"You think Jim's condition has something to do with the loss of the Enterprise, don't you?" Nogura accused.

The blue eyes widened in surprise and some amusement. "Still on the offensive, Nogura? There's no reason to be. You won, remember?"

"A fact which you'll never forgive - or let me forget - if something goes wrong."

"Careful, Admiral, or I'll accuse you of being paranoid." The doctor allowed his sarcastic wit to emerge.

"That man in there was your dearest friend, Doctor. He may die soon. How can you be so unconcerned?"

A tiny, bitter smile played about McCoy's lips. "You answered your own question, Admiral. He was my dearest friend - until you took him and moulded him to your needs." The doctor turned away from the admiral and walked down the corridor.

After a moment of stunned silence Nogura followed him. "I won't accept that, Doctor. I don't believe that you no longer care about Jim Kirk."

"I care. Oh, yes, I still care. But you've left me little to work with."

"Don't give me that line, McCoy. Jim Kirk has been a valuable and respected addition to the Admiralty. He's never complained, been content..."

"Please, Admiral, no pep talk. A man makes do with whatever life hands him... or whatever he hands himself," McCoy said quietly. "Jim Kirk would not - could not - do less."

For several steps the two men walked side by side in silence.

"He's going to die, Leonard, if you don't do something," Nogura stated softly, reaching to the doctor's feelings if nothing else in hopes of getting a positive reaction from the man.

"I know, Heihachiro. I know." The tiredness was back in McCoy's voice. "But there's nothing I can do. The Enterprise is

lost to him now, finally and completely. He has to deal with that on his own, in his own way."

"Are you saying that coma's self-induced?" Nogura asked, shocked.

"I'm not saying anything. Just... thinking out loud. Remembering..." McCoy's voice dropped, becoming low, soft, far away, his blue eyes misting over so that he barely saw the tall figure dressed in black blocking his way.

"My god..." came Nogura's startled voice.

With an effort McCoy focused his eyes. "Spock..." The doctor gaped, unable to believe his eyes, to believe the vision that stood before him.

The Vulcan entered the room and approached the bed where James T. Kirk lay bathed in the soft lights of the life-support systems. As his eyes settled upon the familiar features of the Human,

"Jim... Brother..." Then, in Vulcan, "T'hy'la..." His breath seemed to leave him where he stood.

For what seemed like an eternity he stood, drinking in the sight of the tousled brown hair, darker and more wavy than he remembered. The face, still unlined and satin-smooth. The broad shoulders, the wide chest...

With a start he realised the direction of his thoughts... and its significance. As had been the case five Earth years ago when he had left the Enterprise, and this man...

This man! He now found his objectivity, his Vulcan training and discipline, undermined - undermined sometimes to the point of madness. The madness of illogic, emotions, caring, feeling... protecting with no thought of self...

No. Not again, Spock determined. Long slender fingers went to his temples as he applied the disciplines of Vulcan, of reason, of logic.

When it was done and he was himself again - controlled, detached, objective - he stepped forward and placed his fingers in the proper position on the cool silk of James Kirk's face.

Jim Kirk.

The Human's mind was almost a vacuum. Finding the once dynamic, intriguing essence was difficult, but not impossible with his precision-trained mental skills.

Jim Kirk.

An eternity passed before he received a response.

Sp... Spock. SPOCK?!

Yes. It is Spock.

Where...?

Here.

With me?

Yes.

The Human's mind flooded with joy - which was abruptly cut off, replaced by a swirl of emotions.

You left me. Five years ago. You walked out and left me alone.

Yes.

I needed you.

I, too, had needs.

That I could not fill as your friend?

Hurt. Deep hurt. Pain that was abruptly cut off as well, to be replaced by an oddly familiar detachment.

This need you could not fill, or meet, Jim.

Couldn't you have let me try, at least?

Silence. Then,

No.

I... understand.

Another silence.

If you are ready, I will guide your mind back to an awareness of your body, and of your surroundings.

There was a noticeably reluctant pause. For a while letting go had seemed desirable. But now...

Thank you, Mr. Spock. Lead the way, please, Kirk said with a sigh of resignation.

"Is it working? Any change?" Nogura demanded to know from McCoy and the other doctors who sat watching the silent and - to most of them - mysterious and abstract interaction of the viewscreen.

"I'm sorry, Admiral. Psychic phenomena is not my field," retorted one of the doctors. The others, except for McCoy, nodded in agreement.

Nogura favoured them all with a look of disgust and turned to McCoy. "Leonard?"

But McCoy seemed unaware of anything but the scene before him. "He's back. He came back," McCoy murmured. "He's back, Jim. Oh god, Jim! *He came back!*"

"Dr. McCoy." Nogura placed a hand on his shoulder.

With an effort McCoy's attention finally focused on him.

"Is it working? Is Mr. Spock making any progress?"

The blue eyes, clouded with tears, looked back at the viewscreen. "If there's anything left to save, Spock will find it," McCoy assured the Admiral.

Nogura returned his gaze to the viewscreen.

"Look!" exclaimed one of the doctors suddenly.

On the screen something was happening. Kirk's body, having been immobile for days, was moving slightly. The dark lashes of his eyelids fluttered, lifting open. At the same time Spock was slowly removing his hands from Kirk's face.

Nogura leaned forward and punched a close-up of Jim Kirk's face onto the screen.

Hazel eyes focused with difficulty and looked at the Vulcan. For a moment the hazel depths were bright and full, then they darkened, as if in sadness and loss, before closing again. But the readings above the bed all registered normal; normal and all well.

Nogura fell back into his chair, breathing a sigh of relief. "Thank god," he murmured.

"Yes," McCoy echoed. "And you too, Spock."

Human and Vulcan took a walk though the gardens of the Base Hospital. Kirk reached out, cupping a flower tenderly in his hands.

So much like the Herbarium on the Enterprise...

No. That subject he must avoid... at least for a little while longer.

"How has life been for you planet-side, Spock?" Kirk asked as he straightened, turning to his companion.

"Satisfactory," the Vulcan answered.

"Yeah, mine too," Kirk admitted. Abruptly he turned back to examine yet another flower.

"What brought you to Earth? I thought the Vulcan Masters never left Gol, that they never concerned themselves with anything except their logic and their disciplines."

"I... sensed... and felt... your pain... and grief," the Vulcan answered slowly, quietly.

Kirk straightened, surprise showing on his face, in his eyes. "All that way? From here to Vulcan?"

"Yes," Spock answered simply.

"My god. What is... this... between us?"

Spock found that he had no answer. Brother. Sigh. T'hy'la.

"Well, I'm sorry about that," Kirk apologised after a moment, studying the impassive features. "I'll try and keep the traumatic experiences to a minimum so as not to disturb you again."

Spock inclined his head slightly. "It would be appreciated," the Vulcan said gravely, the dark eyes holding the merest hint of a twinkle.

Kirk started to smile...

"Jim..." came an unwelcome voice into their solitude.

Spock was about to turn toward the intruder when he noticed Kirk's reaction to the interruption. The Human had paled, becoming taut and sickened. Quickly he moved to Kirk's side, going so far as to place himself bodily between Kirk and the two people approaching them. The Vulcan's action so surprised Kirk that for a moment he was oblivious of anything else.

"Jim, you're looking well," a woman's voice was saying.

Kirk's attention returned to the two people and their intrusion. "Lori," he greeted, and moved past the Vulcan to embrace her.

"Heihachiro finally located me and told me of your accident. How horrible!" Lori said sympathetically. "But I see that nothing serious was lost or injured." She held him in a tight embrace for a long moment, reawakening memories of a closeness of not too long ago.

"No, nothing serious lost," Kirk agreed. "Lori, have you met Mr. Spock?"

"No, I haven't." She turned a dazzling smile upon the Vulcan. "How do you do, Mr. Spock. Jim has spoken of you often. I feel as if I know you."

"Indeed." The Vulcan's tone was formal.

The rest of the stroll was spent as a foursome.

At the end of his first full day of being up and about Kirk climbed into his hospital bed with an air of weary exhaustion, but did not lie down immediately. Instead he settled himself into a sitting position, absently tracing a crease out of the dark gold sleep wear that moulded to his body perfectly.

Spock entered the room shortly after Kirk had settled himself.

Gathering his strength to him, Kirk asked the question that had bothered him for most of the day. "When are you leaving, Mr. Spock?"

"Leaving?" was the puzzled response.

"Yes, leaving. Returning to Vulcan." The long lashes lifted until the hazel eyes met the Vulcan's dark ones. "Heihachiro mentioned that you had arrived on a round trip ticket."

"I have no immediate plans for departure," Spock said finally.

Kirk cocked his head slightly, as if studying the lean alien

from a different angle. "I'm tired," he announced suddenly, after a long moment of silence had passed.

"Then I will bid you good-night, sir." Spock turned to leave. He reached the door, then,

"Spock."

He looked back. Kirk sat amidst the soft gold and white of the hospital back-lighting.

"Goodbye," the quiet voice whispered with a chilling finality.

Spock stood for a moment silent, unmoving, surprised by the Human's tone. "No, Jim," he began in denial, thinking perhaps the Human had misunderstood, misinterpreted...

"Yes," Kirk said firmly. "I want you to go. Now. Right now. Tonight."

A cold emptiness began to rise in the Vulcan's soul. "Jim..." he tried again.

But Kirk reached out and turned off the lights, leaving the Vulcan to stand alone in the darkness.

"If you leave him this time you'll kill him for sure, Spock," McCoy's voice said from behind the Vulcan as he walked down the hallway leading to the turbolift.

Spock stopped, but didn't turn. "It was his decision and I am honouring it, Doctor."

"He's not your commanding officer any longer, Spock," McCoy reminded him.

Drawing a deep breath, Spock set his lean shoulders. "What would you have me do, Doctor?" he asked.

"If you can't figure that out for yourself, Vulcan, then get out and don't bother coming back," the doctor said bitterly.

Slowly Spock turned to face him. "Always you have expected from me what you have believed to be in me; and always I am unable to find that which you insist should be there. It is the same among Vulcans. So it has been, always..."

They stood facing each other, silence surrounding them for several seconds.

"How can I help another when I cannot even help myself?" Spock questioned the doctor, at last speaking of his self-condemnation.

"Maybe you're too concerned with self."

"Perhaps. But if one's self is not functional, not whole, then his contribution to others is distorted, twisted."

McCoy cursed under his breath. "Who the devil told you that you had to be perfect?" he wanted to know. "Why can't you be content with yourself as you are? Or, if not content, at least be willing to

accept yourself until the changes come.

"Spock, what is it you want? To be all Vulcan? Tell me what 'all Vulcan' entails. Is it walking out of the lives of your friends? Friends who love you for what you are, what you contribute to their lives? Who accept you as you are, without trying to change you, accepting you as part of a unique something that comprised one of the most formidable teams in Starfleet and Federation history?"

The doctor stopped, his eyes searching the Vulcan's face. He found only blankness. Defeated, he turned away. His shoulders sagged with resignation. "I must be three kinds of a fool." He laughed bitterly, and not with amusement. "Won't I ever learn? I never made much of an impression on what was between you and Jim. Why I think I can undo any of it, when I don't know how to *heal* what you had... What you *can't* understand..." McCoy's voice stopped as he stepped away, taking two steps before his way was blocked by the Vulcan. Blue eyes questioned dark ones.

"What would you have me do, Doctor?" Spock repeated helplessly.

"Get Jim away from the Admiralty. Kidnap him if you have to, but get him out of here. Off this planet. You know the Enterprise was reported missing four weeks ago. She was investigating the area of space where the energy barrier is. Starfleet has sent out ships to investigate, but haven't found anything. Jim wanted to head up a special crew and go searching himself, but Nogura refused to allow it. The two had several arguments. It was from one of those arguments that Jim, after losing his temper, stormed away into the aircar collision that put him here."

Spock's slanted eyebrows knitted together slightly as he considered McCoy's words. Finally he nodded and turned back towards Kirk's room.

"Spock?" the doctor called after him.

The Vulcan glanced back, and was momentarily overwhelmed by the sight of the lonely dark-haired man dressed in white standing alone in the dimly lit corridor.

"If it's not too much to ask, could you take me, too?" McCoy asked, his voice almost a whisper. "Jim wasn't the only one who suffered when you left that long-ago day."

Spock moved again, retracing his steps until he came to a stop before the doctor. Slowly his hands lifted until his fingers touched McCoy's lined face. The Human didn't move or flinch away. McCoy's only response was the fall of a single tear.

Kirk awoke slowly, reluctantly. He had been a fool to let himself be drawn back to this life...

No - the chance to have Spock at his side again had been worth the effort. He had been a fool to send him away so soon, but it had been necessary. The longer Spock had stayed, the harder the parting, the inevitable parting, would have been.

Yet could the pain be any worse than what he had already endured, was still enduring, after five long years?

"That pain is at an end, Jim," a familiar voice said quietly.

Kirk's eyes flew open. "Spock!" Kirk sat up. "What are you doing here?"

"You need me," the Vulcan explained simply.

Hazel eyes studied him. "So?" Kirk demanded.

"It has come to my attention that I, too, have need of you, my friend."

Kirk's eyes narrowed. "What need?"

Spock hesitated, searching his mind for the words, but before he could speak,

"Never mind. I don't think I want that answered." The Human drew a deep breath, withdrawing behind the wall that had somehow come between them. "Well, so you've decided to stay. I won't ask how long. I don't care. I don't want to know. Okay, you say I need you. For what?"

"McCoy has told me that you desire to organise a special mission to find the Enterprise." Spock visibly relaxed at not having to explain these unexpected changes in his recent behaviour.

"I do." Kirk settled back in the bed. "Nogura's forbidden it."

"That, I am aware of. However, if you are willing, we can bypass Nogura's authority and thereby his consent."

"How?" Kirk straightened up, hope he had thought dead starting to come to life once more.

"A specifically designed ship, built in the space around Vulcan. Its purpose is for scientific contact and exploration. Much like the Constitution Class Starships."

"A civilian ship and crew... Do you think they could be persuaded to help us?"

"Possibly." A sudden glint of light sparkled in the dark eyes. "Especially since the crew of the IDIC is composed of many of my relatives."

A slow grin spread across Kirk's face.

"Also," the Vulcan continued, "if my request is acceptable to the Scientific Society of Vulcan, I will be its Captain."

Kirk was momentarily startled by that piece of news, not exactly sure how to accept it or what to feel about it.

"How soon will you know?"

"In approximately three point five days, six hours and five minutes."

"Good. That's plenty of time to settle things with Nogura."

"Settle things?" Spock inquired.

"Yes. I'm resigning," Kirk answered, an expression in his eyes that had not been there for five years.

Four weeks later a specially dispatched Vulcan shuttle left Earth orbit and headed into deep space to rendezvous with the IDIC. Aboard the shuttle was Admiral James T. Kirk. Nogura had finally given his official consent and blessing to the mission, seeing that Kirk was determined to go anyway, and that he would have resigned from the Fleet if only to get his point across. Also on board were Commander Spock, the IDIC's Captain, Dr. Leonard 'Bones' McCoy, Vice Admiral Lori Ciana, Lieutenant-Commanders Kyle and Riley, along with several other officers who had served aboard the Enterprise under Kirk at one time or another, men and women who had become thoroughly bored and disillusioned with the 'success' of their planet-bound promotions and ambitions.

"Forty Humans and five hundred Vulcans." McCoy shook his head in rueful anticipation and settled back into his seat. "Yep, it's going to be an interesting mission." The blue eyes fixed on Spock. "Especially having to call you 'Captain'."

"Doctor, you have no grounds upon which to complain, since this entire venture was precipitated by your own propensity to 'meddling'!" Spock responded pleasantly.

Kirk smiled and settled back into his own seat, a feeling of contentment and anticipation making his blood flow with the vitality and drive of old. For the moment no doubt or fear touched him. He seemed to know that they would find the Enterprise and her crew.

And then what?

He even knew the answer to that. Somehow, some way, he would take back his rightful place as her Captain.

"Captain..."

Kirk looked up, grinning.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Don't be, Spock. I like it. I always have, and it's a title I intend to get back."

"What about Will Decker?" McCoy asked.

"There are other Starships," Kirk replied.

"For everyone but you, huh?"

Kirk nodded. "That's about the size of it, Bones."

"I sure hope Scotty, Chris, Uhura and the rest of the crew are all right," McCoy mused after a long moment of companionable silence.

Spock's dark eyes rested on the two Humans with satisfaction. There was a feeling of rightness about this course of action which he had set for himself. He, too, knew they would find the Enterprise, and knew too that Kirk would again command his beloved Starship.

And after that?

Well... there was no law, or authority, to prevent the IDIC from becoming a Companion Ship to the Enterprise...



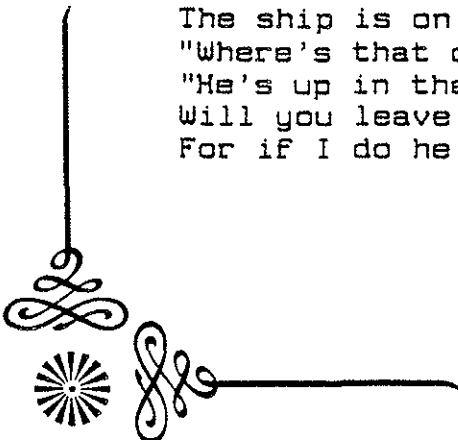
James, James, Starship Captain, Starship Captain,
Took great care of his Starship
Though he was only three.
"Starship," he said, said he,
"You mustn't fly through the sky so blue
If you don't fly through with me."

Hey diddle dumpling, my friend Spock
Went to bed in a lady's frock
Boot on one foot the other in a sock
Hey diddle dumpling, my friend Spock.

Spickery Spackery Spock, the Enterprise in hock
Kirk in a pet at a game of roulette
Spickery Spackery Spock.

Little boy blue
Come play on your lyre,
The crew's in the shuttle
The ship is on fire.
"Where's that damn Vulcan gone now?" shouted Jim.
"He's up in the Jeffries tube, don't wait for him.
Will you leave him?" "No, not I,
For if I do he'll be sure to cry."

Meg Wright





FINAL ANALYSIS



by

Sheila Clark

There were several A-spectrum suns in the area; two of them had planets. On one, there was a pre-sapient feline race; investigation had proved that there was a possibility of these creatures developing intelligence - eventually. The Enterprise was carrying three specially trained scientists whose primary job was to examine the distribution of the beasts. Previous investigations had indicated that the distribution was sparse; they were common enough where they occurred, but their presence was local. Were the different groups of the same species, or were they different, but possibly related, types? What was the relationship between the groups? Lastly - and most difficult - what was their level of intelligence? To assess this, one at least of the creatures would have to be captured - and it was known they had rather nasty claws. Although they were feline the claws were not retractable, so they were blunt - but they were well able to tear great gouges in anyone the cat attacked.

On a planet in the other solar system, the Federation had set up an unmanned recording station which was gathering data on the solar wind in the system. Unfortunately, since the various suns were quite close together, the solar wind data tended to be confused. Interpreting it was a considerable challenge for Federation scientists.

Despite the problems of interpreting the data, the visit to the station was perfectly standard, even although protective suits would have to be worn. Because it was so routine, Kirk decided to collect the scientific data first. Two or three orbits should be long enough for a scientist to collect the records and check out the systems. Then they could head for the other planet, with straightforward routine accomplished.

Maybe four orbits Kirk conceded as he remembered that it was nearly a year since the station had last been visited - by the Lexington - so the recording units would be almost full.

As Science Officer, Spock went down to collect the record tapes and check over the machinery - and he decided to take Chekov with him. It would all be good experience for the young officer.

When they entered the station, everything appeared to be normal, but in the middle of the check all hell let loose. There was an explosion; both men were sent staggering by the force of it. Spock landed sprawled on top of Chekov, who hit his head and shoulder against the edge of one of the machines as he fell, slashing his suit and gashing himself quite badly.

The Vulcan lay, half-stunned, for a few seconds. He was roused by a steady crackling that was getting louder with every moment. He raised a dazed head to look at the computer he had just been servicing, and staggered to his feet, pulling the semi-conscious

Chekov up with him. The computer complex was afire, blazing fiercely in the hydrogen-filled atmosphere, and it was clear that nothing he could do would control it. He dragged Chekov outside, and urged him to stumble a few yards to get away from the flaming building. From a hundred yards away they watched as the station quickly burnt itself out, the flames spreading rapidly - the high hydrogen content of the atmosphere ensured that.

"What happened, Mr. Spock?" Chekov managed.

Spock shook his head. "I have no way of knowing, Ensign, though I suspect that I may have inadvertently caused something to spark. All we can do now is report what happened." He pulled out his communicator. "Spock to Enterprise."

"Spock - we were just about to call you. What's happening down there?"

"There has been an explosion. We are returning to the ship. Mr. Chekov is slightly hurt. I will give you a full report when we are aboard."

McCoy met them in the transporter room. He ordered them both to Sickbay, of course. Spock was unsurprised; and as usual, knowing that it would worry McCoy if he failed to protest, insisted that there was no need for him to be checked out. He went, however, rather less unwillingly than McCoy realised.

In Sickbay it soon transpired that both men had picked up rather larger doses of radiation than was safe, presumably from the exploding computers and machinery, and McCoy packed them both into beds. Chekov went willingly - he was beginning to feel slightly sick. Even Spock, while he continued to make the protest that he knew McCoy would expect, was glad to lie down.

Privately more worried than he let them see, McCoy went to his office to call Kirk. "It's a very bad dose of radiation poisoning," he said. "Spock has a worse dose than Chekov. They'll both be on the sick-list for several days at least; and I have no idea what the long-term effects, if any, will be."

"Let me know as soon as you do," Kirk said.

He turned away from the intercom with an inward sigh. Spock, sick. Steady, reliable Spock... who was only off sick if he was injured in some way. He smiled slightly to himself in spite of his inner worry, thinking that McCoy would probably find it difficult to keep Spock in bed.

And Chekov. That left him with no really experienced navigators. During the senior navigator's temporary absence on sick leave, all the rest of the navigators were even younger than Chekov, and while they mostly showed promise, he would have liked the more experienced Chekov available during the next day or two. Now they were well into the area affected by the solar winds from the various stars, and the region was subject to considerable turbulence. The eddies and currents in space caused by the solar winds could be quite dangerous.

He turned his attention to the young navigator currently on duty. Mason had considerable potential, and Kirk knew it; but he

seemed to be incurably lazy. Sometimes Kirk wondered how he had ever summoned up the energy to pass the Academy's exams. Then, apparently without trying, he would produce a piece of brilliance that made all his previous laziness all the more annoying. No treatment, no variation of treatment, had been successful in turning Mason from an erratic officer into an efficient, reliable one. Kirk hadn't entirely given up hope of finding a formula that would work, and produce some response, but he didn't have much hope. He had begun to feel that Mason would be his first failure.

"Mr. Mason - set course for Hamra Five," he ordered.

"Aye, sir... Course laid in, sir."

"Is the solar wind affecting your calculations, Mr. Mason?"

"Negative, sir. No effect so far," Mason replied after the most perfunctory of checks.

"Keep watching," Kirk ordered. "We'll be passing between two stars soon, and one of them is reported to be at sunspot maximum - it could be dangerous."

"Aye, sir." Mason thought about it briefly, then put the matter out of his mind. Kirk was always pushing him, setting him unnecessary problems to work out. This was undoubtedly another such problem - totally unnecessary. He had never stopped to consider that a difficulty faced in a trial situation could be considered more dispassionately than in the heat of an emergency, and that if he had faced it in a test situation he would be more able to react quickly and efficiently in a real emergency. He didn't like having to think unless it was absolutely essential.

He allowed his mind to wander a little. That pretty yeoman he had spoken to at breakfast time... what were his chances of getting her to his room that night...?

He was deeply involved in his fantasies when the ship shuddered and jerked off course, snapping him out of his abstraction.

"Compensate, Mr. Sulu!" Kirk exclaimed. "Mr. Mason - what happened?"

"I... I don't know, sir."

"We're being pulled into a solar eddy," Sulu reported.

"Warp eight - try to pull free."

"Warp eight, sir... we're clear."

"Resume warp one."

"Warp one, sir."

"Mr. Mason - do you know yet what happened?"

"I'm afraid not, sir." Mason was frantically checking his console without any clear idea of what he was looking for.

"But... you navigated us right into the eddy," Sulu exclaimed.

"What's that?" Kirk snapped.

"The instruments were showing the eddy clearly, sir. I thought Mr. Mason had allowed for it until we were pulled in."

"Well, Mr. Mason?" Kirk asked grimly.

"I... I didn't realise that it was an eddy, sir," Mason excused himself.

"Mr. Mason. I admit that Mr. Sulu has far more experience than you do. In spite of that, however, the reading for a solar wind eddy is one thing that even the most inexperienced navigator should be able to recognise," Kirk said, his voice icy. "I'm afraid that I cannot consider this mistake excusable. You have behaved with extreme incompetence, Mr. Mason; your carelessness might have wrecked the ship, with the loss of every life on board. Including your own."

Mason stared at him, shaken by the iron in Kirk's voice. He had never realised the Captain could be so... *so unreasonable*, his mind whimpered. He had never been able to bear anger; all his life he had dodged it by avoiding committing himself... only this time he hadn't managed it. But surely the Captain wasn't so lacking in understanding as to blame him for not recognising something he had never seen before - except during training, but surely that didn't count? Nor had the angry voice stopped yet. The words drifted over his head, half blocked by the trembling in his mind.

"Incompetent... careless... lazy... wasting time... wasting the money that had been spent on his training... wasting his potential..."

"No!" he gasped, his voice breaking. "No, I can't..." He buried his face in his hands, sobbing.

Kirk stared at him in blank amazement. He had expected excuses, a whole spate of them, and was fully ready to answer each one of them; he wasn't expecting this child's response. He glanced at the Security guards on duty.

"One of you, take Mr. Mason down to Sickbay," he ordered.

It was a tired and worried McCoy who met them in Sickbay. He still hadn't ascertained whether or not there would be any lasting damage to either Spock or Chekov from their exposure to the radiation; the last thing he needed was a hysterical crewman taking up his time.

"What happened?" he asked irritably.

Mason, who had begun to quieten a little on the way to Sickbay, was set off again by the annoyance in McCoy's voice.

"Oh lord!" McCoy exclaimed. "Here, get him onto a bed." He reached for a hypo and gave the hysterical Mason a quick shot. Mason subsided in the unconsciousness of tranquillised sleep. McCoy glanced enquiringly at the guard.

The man explained what had happened, adding, "Mr. Mason kept saying, all the way here, 'I never saw anything like it before. I didn't know what it was.'"

"Hmm. All right, thanks. I'll see to him. You'd better get back on duty."

As the guard left, McCoy gave a resigned sigh and turned his attention back to Mason. He gave the unconscious man as full an examination as he could - for some of the tests, Mason would need to be conscious - including an encephalogram. The results were not promising. He studied them for a while, unhappily, then re-ran some of the tests. Even incomplete, the diagnosis was unmistakeable.

Mason had suffered a complete nervous breakdown.

He turned to the intercom. "McCoy to Bridge."

"Bridge. Kirk here."

"Can you come down to Sickbay, Captain?"

Kirk glanced round the Bridge. The relief navigator was a steady young man who didn't show half the potential Mason had done, but who *had* proved himself to be wholly reliable. If he wasn't sure, he asked; and while it made him a little slow when he was faced with a learning situation, he had never had to ask twice, and he would probably become a steady, if uninspired, assistant navigator, even though he was unlikely to rise to be Head of Department. He wouldn't go wrong - if in doubt, he would ask Sulu.

Kirk glanced at Leslie, who was standing in at Spock's station. "Report, Mr. Leslie."

"We appear to be clear of the region immediately affected by the solar wind turbulence," Leslie replied.

"I'll be straight down, Bones."

He found McCoy in one of his most irritable moods. In the few minutes since he had called Kirk he had found time to run one more check, and had realised that Mason's breakdown was likely to be permanent.

Kirk took one look at his face, and immediately jumped to a wrong conclusion. "Spock?" he asked anxiously.

"No, not Spock!" McCoy snapped. "Your latest victim, Captain. Mason. He's had a full and probably permanent nervous breakdown. He'll have to be assigned to rehabilitation, with no certainty that it can do anything for him. I've told you before about pushing these young hopefuls too fast, *Captain*. They're not all brilliant, like a certain James T. Kirk. Most of them need time to develop. I'll be logging this breakdown as your fault entirely, for expecting too much of him too quickly."

Kirk listened to McCoy's accusation with mixed feelings. There was relief at knowing that Spock was all right - or at least no worse. There was a trace of annoyance that McCoy was so worried about Mason, who certainly didn't deserve much consideration after his negligence. There was also a feeling of guilt about Mason that he knew to be irrational, since, contrary to McCoy's belief, he had not pushed Mason particularly hard; he had done no more than tear the man off a strip that was well-deserved. The combination of emotions caused Kirk to flare up.

"That's enough, Doctor! You're exceeding your authority!"

"I have every right to make such a report, Captain, and you know it. I have to state what, in my opinion, is the reason for his condition, and in my opinion, that is it. You expect too much of your young officers, push them too hard. This may teach you a lesson, but I doubt it. You're too pig-headed, too sure that the almighty James T. Kirk knows best. You've begun to think your judgement is always infallible. You'll keep on expecting too much of your subordinates, and sooner or later you'll cause another one to crack up - and when that happens, don't say I didn't warn you! But I tell you this, Captain. You've ruined Mason, probably permanently, and I hope you're proud of yourself!"

"I said that's enough! In my opinion that man was lazy and careless, and if he couldn't stand being disciplined, then he's well out of the service."

"No regrets, Captain? No shame for ruining his life? Only a godlike feeling of satisfaction that you've got rid of a useless crewman? Is that all you feel?"

"Doctor, now you're presuming on our friendship. You have the right to make such a report, but I'm damned if I have to listen to you moralising about it!" He turned to go, then swung back. "Running the ship is my job, and I'll be obliged if you remember that. Your job is in Sickbay, and I'll be further obliged if in future you limit your activities wholly to where you belong." He stamped out.

McCoy stared after him, knowing that he had gone too far, and suddenly realising that there was no way he could apologise. Because what he had said was the truth - exaggerated, perhaps, but still the truth. Kirk *did* tend to push the young officers. Granted, he didn't expect anything of them that he hadn't been able to do himself, but he had been an exceptionally able cadet. McCoy sighed. He could have put it more tactfully... but it had hurt to be accused of presuming on their friendship when his reaction had been caused by entirely medical anger.

He went out to check on his patients, and found Spock awake and staring towards the office door.

"What happened there?" Spock asked quietly.

"If you heard enough to know that something happened, you probably heard enough to know what it is," McCoy replied flatly.

"You've quarrelled with the Captain about Mason?"

McCoy nodded. "He wasn't worth quarrelling about, either. Jim's right - if he couldn't stand being disciplined, he's better out of Starfleet. But I still think Jim pushed him too hard."

Kirk returned to the Bridge in a foul temper. It wasn't helped by the fact that McCoy was right; maybe he *had* expected too much of Mason - but he'd pushed Chekov as hard, and several other young officers as well, and none of them had broken down under it. But McCoy didn't need to be so... so insensitive to *his* feelings on the matter. McCoy should have realised that he was worried about Spock... too worried to be wholly concerned about anyone else; then

he realised that McCoy was probably just as worried about Spock, and that Mason's breakdown had taken McCoy from tending the Vulcan.

But even understanding that didn't help Kirk forgive McCoy for the way he had spoken. He could forgive the words, he realised, but not the tone of voice McCoy had used. Maybe his reaction had been rather childish, but he was still the final authority on board. He had no intention of allowing that authority to be eroded by an over-zealous doctor, especially when he had allowed that same doctor a great deal more freedom of movement and speech than was normally permitted to ship's medical staff.

A wave of desolation went through him as he realised that he had probably lost McCoy's friendship for good. Even if he could bring himself to apologise for his attitude, he couldn't expect McCoy to forget.

In Sickbay, McCoy decided that Chekov's condition wasn't as bad as he had feared, and let him return to his own quarters, though not back on duty. Spock, however, showed a more positive reaction, either because he had been exposed to a greater degree of the radiation, or because it had reacted differently on his copper-based blood. He decided to keep Spock in for a little longer.

Although he still felt far from well, Spock fretted against McCoy's decision. He was anxious to return to the bridge, where Kirk was by now undoubtedly blaming himself for Mason's collapse; but there was nothing he could do to change the surgeon's mind.

Bored, he began to watch Mason, who was conscious again but lying gibbering to himself. McCoy hadn't been able to pick out anything of what the sick man was saying, but Spock, with his sharper ears, could follow a little of it, and didn't like the tone of what he heard. The man's attitude seemed paranoid.

He mentioned this to McCoy, who shook his head. "Hardly, Spock. He had a complete nervous breakdown, remember. Unnatural speech patterns are quite likely, and considering the circumstances leading up to the breakdown, it's quite possible that he feels victimised."

Spock was not convinced, and when McCoy was called away an hour or so later to deal with a man taken ill and collapsing in Engineering, the Vulcan got out of bed the moment the door had closed behind his unsuspecting friend. Ignoring the dizziness that pounced as soon as he stood upright, he padded quickly over to the surgeon's desk.

It took only a few seconds to open the filing drawer and find Mason's psychological profile.

Spock knew that McCoy would regard his action as unethical, but he felt that he had to do it. McCoy had already refused to apologise to Kirk for his insubordinate behaviour, but if there was positive proof that Mason was abnormal...

He found proof. There were definite indications of instability in the profile, and Spock found himself wondering why Starfleet had ever accepted the man for training in the first place, or passed him out as ready for Starship duties in the second. The indications were not strongly marked, but on the basis of them Spock knew that he

would not have accepted the man. It was certain that whatever job Mason had taken, unless it was completely undemanding, he would inevitably have cracked. He did not have the temperament to handle any sort of pressure.

Spock was still lost in thought, bending over the tape, when McCoy came back, having packed the sick man off to bed in his own quarters - the man had simply picked up a bug of some kind, relatively harmless, that had caused a sudden but temporary weakness.

"Just what do you think you're doing, Spock?" McCoy asked.

"Checking out a theory, Doctor. I suggest you examine this tape."

McCoy obeyed, then looked up at Spock in horror, his mind whirling. He should have checked Mason's profile as soon as the ensign collapsed, before he called Kirk down, before passing any judgement - but he had been too worried about Spock. He had allowed himself to form an opinion on the basis of surface appearances rather than checking all the facts. In short, he had failed to give his full attention to Mason.

Spock was speaking again. "On the basis of this evidence, Doctor, it would seem that your assessment of the situation was incorrect. Can you not apologise to the Captain?"

Slowly, McCoy shook his head. "Not after what he said to me, Spock. You can tell him if you want; if I do, he'll think I'm just making excuses, and I'm not sticking my neck out again."

"Doctor... have you reported to him personally since...?"

"No, Spock. I've sent him official reports via a yeoman, as per the book. As I will continue to do unless he apologises for what he said. I was not taking advantage of anything; I made a medical judgement as Chief Medical Officer. It was my duty to state what I believed was the cause of Mason's collapse. The fact that I now realise I made a mistake doesn't alter that."

Once he was released from Sickbay, Spock made his way to the Bridge. He hadn't seen Kirk during this time, either; Kirk had studiously avoided Sickbay in case he ran into McCoy... despite his desire to visit Spock.

Kirk looked round as he entered. "Spock! You're quite fit again?"

"Yes, Captain." He hesitated. "Captain, could I have a word with you in private?"

Kirk glanced at him, guessing what that word would be. "If it's about Dr. McCoy, Spock, the answer is no."

"No, Captain," Spock said, with an inward sigh. "It is about Mr. Mason."

Kirk got up and followed Spock into the elevator. Neither spoke until they were in Kirk's quarters.

"Well, Mr. Spock?"

"I have been watching Mr. Mason while I have been incarcerated in Sickbay, Captain, and I came to the conclusion that he is paranoid. I found an opportunity to study his psychological profile, and it shows definite abnormalities. The man should never have been accepted for Starfleet, Captain, and he would eventually have broken down anyway. Dr. McCoy confirms."

"Nice of him." Spock winced inwardly at the tone of Kirk's voice. "However, I believe he could have noticed it before, when Mason first came on board, for example, even if Starfleet missed it."

"There has been no need to study Mason's profile until now, Captain; and at the time when he first broke down, Dr. McCoy was too busy to check it as well as running the tests on him..."

"You needn't make excuses for him, Spock," Kirk said coldly. "I realise this situation does make things... difficult for you; but I would appreciate it if you would remember that from now on, my dealings with Dr. McCoy are official only, as I have no doubt he wishes his dealings with me to be."

Spock looked at him, and gave up. Normally, if Kirk knew he was wrong he would apologise immediately; this behaviour was uncharacteristic. But he had heard enough of the original quarrel to realise how deeply Kirk must have been hurt; and although as a Vulcan he was incapable of bearing a grudge - that would be illogical - he knew, as a Human, how easy it was to be deeply hurt. His crewmates hurt him often, without realising it - even Kirk himself had hurt him once or twice, and he knew himself to be the one man that Kirk would not want to hurt under any circumstances. He could guess that Kirk wanted to make up the quarrel; he knew McCoy did. But both had been too badly hurt to be willing to make the first move. He could tell each of them that the other regretted the quarrel, but that didn't guarantee anything. Each would simply say, "Then why doesn't he come to me himself?"

Spock was still trying fruitlessly to think of a way to bring Kirk and McCoy together again when the Enterprise reached Hamra Five. As Kirk had said, he felt himself in an awkward situation. These men were both his friends; he loved them both - though he would never admit it in so many words - and, even though he knew it was illogical, in this dilemma he felt himself disloyal to each in his friendship with the other.

The party of specialists beamed down to start their studies on the felines. Spock, as Science Officer, was expected to accompany them, at least for the initial part of the expedition. Kirk decided to go too. He liked to get the feel of an alien environment, and the only effective way to do so was to go down.

The initial phase of the investigation was quickly carried out. It was fairly easily established that the beasts had fanned out from a common centre as their numbers grew; their distribution in groups was solely due to the availability of food; they gathered where there was plenty of grazing for the herbivores that were their main source of food, although by observation they discovered that the creatures also ate tiny rodents and beetles - or something closely resembling beetles. The groups didn't mix, under apparently normal circumstances, but during four days' observation it became clear that if a member of one group approached another group, it would be accepted - with reservations, perhaps, but accepted.

On board the Enterprise McCoy sat in his office and fretted. He knew Kirk and Spock were down there; he hadn't liked what he had heard about the feline claws. He knew the time to try to capture one of the creatures must be getting close - and he found himself wishing he were there too, to see that Spock - and Kirk, he admitted to himself - were all right. He would not apologise, but he was becoming desperate to accept an apology. He kept thinking back to occasions when Kirk had saved him... to one incident in particular, when he had been a very new, untrusting and unfriendly crewmember, and Kirk had risked a terrible death by burning to save him, succeeding at the cost of a badly burned hand...

He knew that the scientists had come up with a cage in which to capture the necessary specimen, and planned to bait it with food, but he wasn't happy about it. Too many things could go wrong...

On the planet things were not going quite as planned.

They had set three baited cages as traps, a little way apart, and had successfully caught one of the felines. Verrier, one of the scientists, was the first to see that they had been successful; he had gone over to the cage to check it, when he was attacked by another of the beasts. He screamed as it rushed him, and tried to dodge away, but it followed him as he ran. Catching up with him without too much effort, it raked him with its claws several times, then fled as the other men came running, attracted by the scientist's cries.

Kirk took one look at Verrier, and turned to Spock. "Have him beamed up to Sickbay right away," he ordered.

Spock checked the injured man quickly. "Captain, I think he's too badly hurt to be beamed up before getting any attention. I think we should call Dr. McCoy down to attend to him here."

Kirk's lips tightened. "Very well, Mr. Spock, if you think it advisable."

He turned away as Spock pulled out his communicator. Why couldn't Bones apologise? He'd seen the profile now, he knew he'd misjudged Kirk, so why couldn't he say so? He would be prepared to meet Bones halfway - more than halfway - but he wouldn't make the first approach. Not after the way Bones had spoken... As he strode over to join the other scientists clustered around the cage, he noticed that the other felines had not gone far; they were poised as if ready for flight and they were watching the men gathered around the cage intently.

When the intercom buzzed, McCoy grabbed automatically for his medical kit. There could be no other reason for the call. *God, not Spock or Jim*, he prayed as he flicked the intercom.

"Mr. Spock calling you from the planet's surface, Doctor," Uhura told him. "One of the scientists has been attacked."

He let out his breath in a sigh of relief. He would have

preferred that nobody was hurt, but if someone had to be, then it was a cause for relief that it was not one of his friends.

Despite everything, he knew he still thought of Kirk as his friend.

Kirk was nowhere in sight when McCoy materialised. The doctor didn't know whether to be glad or sorry; he had managed to avoid meeting Kirk at all since their quarrel, but somehow he felt that if they could meet, a look might be enough to let them make contact again. On the other hand, he could be wrong; Kirk might simply ignore him, and by doing so exacerbate matters - if indeed they *could* be made worse. But Spock was waiting, and led him to where Verrier lay a little distance from the cage where the other scientists were busy with tricorders. He had been moved to the shade of a bush, but that was all; they had felt it better to wait for the doctor to arrive rather than trying to apply first aid. Then the Vulcan removed himself, disappearing in the direction of the cage.

McCoy bent over Verrier, checking him quickly. His first thought was that the scientist wasn't as badly hurt as all that; he could have been beamed up - then he realised that Spock might have done this deliberately, hoping that somehow by forcing Kirk to meet McCoy under these circumstances, the breach might be healed. It showed a deviousness that McCoy would not have considered the Vulcan capable of; but if this was in fact his idea, it seemed doomed to failure by the simple fact that Kirk was nowhere to be seen.

He pulled out a hypo. It would be kinder to Verrier to sedate him while he cleaned out the gashes the feline's claws had inflicted. He had just got it out when he heard a snarl, and looked up. Facing him was one of the cat-like creatures. Had the creature come back for its prey?

As it sprang he dodged desperately, whirling to remain facing it. It charged again; he dodged again... In his fixed need to avoid being caught by it, he forgot even to call out for help - and there was no-one in sight. Even Verrier seemed to have been struck dumb in the need to avoid attracting the cat's attention.

Not far away, Kirk sat on a boulder wondering if he was being childish again in not at least seeing what McCoy's report on Verrier's condition was. But he was somehow afraid to see McCoy. He had tried - successfully - to avoid the doctor since their quarrel; he hoped that if they did meet, *something* would make them look at each other... make contact... but he was afraid to try, afraid that McCoy would snub him... and in so doing, make things completely unmendable. If indeed they were mendable now.

He was snapped from his abstraction by a snarling sound.

Snarling?

He leaped to his feet, and ran. As he came out from among the boulders he was horrified to see that a feline - perhaps the same one, perhaps a different one, he had no way of knowing - had come back. It was attacking McCoy, who was, at least for the moment, unhurt, dodging frantically as the beast charged; but it was obvious that McCoy couldn't keep it up much longer.

Without stopping to think further, Kirk rushed forward. Nothing mattered except that Bones was in danger. He couldn't use his phaser at this range because of McCoy's proximity to the beast, but if he could get closer...

The feline saw him coming, changed direction with startling suddenness, and charged towards him. He went down under its claws, feeling them tear down his arm. He gripped its throat fiercely, holding it away from his own throat with all his strength, knowing that that strength was running out of him with his blood. Then the beast collapsed, and he saw McCoy holding a hypo - and Spock running up. The last thing he was aware of before he fainted was the anxiety on McCoy's face as he looked down at Kirk... and even as he fainted he knew he could apologise now... for in that look McCoy had made the first move - or had he, running in like that...?

McCoy rushed both men up to Sickbay. He forced himself to deal with Verrier first - after all, he was the first one injured, and had already had to suffer more pain than necessary because of the sequence of events. McCoy cleaned out the gashes and disinfected them, bandaged them, and dismissed Verrier to his quarters with instructions to take it easy and do no more than process data - if he felt he *had* to do something. Then McCoy turned his attention to the still unconscious Kirk.

He cleaned out the gashes on Kirk's arms, noting as he did so that they looked worse than Verrier's injuries, even though Verrier had been more extensively mauled than Kirk. He ran a diagnostic scanner over the arms and frowned at the results. He injected Kirk, and continued with the cleaning and disinfecting of the gashes.

The door opened, and Spock came in. McCoy glanced round at him, nodded, and went on.

"How is the Captain?" Spock asked

"I'm not sure," McCoy replied. "Somehow the cuts have become poisoned, but it can't have been anything on the cat's claws - Verrier was okay."

"You mean you don't think the creatures have poisoned claws, Doctor?"

"That's exactly what I mean, Spock."

Spock looked at Kirk's arms, at the long gouges that were becoming a really angry red. "I instructed the scientists to cage the creature you sedated, Doctor, while it was still unconscious. I will go back and see if there is, in fact, any harmful substance on its claws."

"Well, for heaven's sake, be careful," McCoy muttered. "I don't want you as a patient too."

"I always endeavour to be careful," Spock replied with dignity.

Kirk was still unconscious when Spock returned. He brought back some peculiar-looking wet mud.

"This was adhering to the creature's claws, Doctor," Spock said. "I am inclined to suspect that it is dust from the surface adhering to Mr. Verrier's blood on its claws."

McCoy made a face. "Would you analyse it for me, Spock?" he asked. "I don't really want to leave the Captain yet; he seems to be getting fevered."

"Is there no medication you can give him to reduce the fever?"

"Not until I know what caused it."

Spock nodded, and went through to the lab.

He was soon back, but during the few minutes he was away Kirk began to mutter in delirium. Try as he might, McCoy could pick out nothing of what Kirk was saying, except that he suddenly exclaimed clearly, "Look out!"

On his return, Spock handed McCoy the report on the bloody dust, and the doctor checked it quickly.

"Ah."

"You know what is wrong?"

"I think so." He moved to the medical cabinet, checked its contents, and took out a vial. He transferred some of its contents to a hypo, added a little distilled water, and injected Kirk. "He should be all right now."

Spock nodded. "Then I will leave him in your capable hands, Doctor."

"Wait... Spock..." McCoy was suddenly nervous at the thought of being left alone with Kirk.

Spock looked straight at him. "If you simply show your normal concern over the Captain's condition, I think you will find that you have nothing to worry about," he suggested, and left.

McCoy stared after him, then turned back to Kirk. He bent over, examining him, trying to control his face... he had no intention of letting Kirk see how he cared if he could possibly help it - not unless Kirk made the first move. He would not... presume... on Kirk's past friendship...

Kirk's eyes opened, to look straight up into McCoy's worried ones.

"How are you feeling, Captain?" McCoy asked, formally but very, very gently.

Kirk smiled up at him. "I'm fine, Bones... thank you."

"I'm the one who should be thanking you," McCoy replied. "You saved my life."

"And you saved mine. So we're quits. How long are you going to keep me here?"

"Well, if you really want to, you can go to your own quarters... but I'd rather you didn't." He hesitated, then said abruptly,

"Captain - about Mason..."

"Let's forget about Mason, shall we?" Kirk asked.

McCoy gave a relieved grin. "I should have checked his profile first though, Jim. Only I was worried about Spock."

"So was I."

They smiled at each other, both relieved that their quarrel had not, after all, been final. McCoy turned to the intercom.

"McCoy to Bridge."

"Bridge. Spock here."

"Jim's conscious, if you want to come down and see him."

"I'll be straight down."

Was there a note of relief in Spock's voice? If so, he would never admit it... but McCoy suspected that Spock was relieved that he and Kirk were once more on speaking terms.

Spock entered and crossed to Kirk's bed. He looked from one to the other, and they smiled back at him. He seemed to relax.

The trio was once more complete.



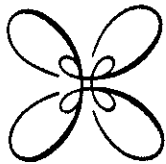
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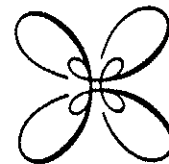
I have loved you across galaxies,
Across light-years, and through time-warps.
You have been as close as a random thought,
As far as the rim of space.
You have dwelt within my secret heart
That no man has plumbed the depths of.
Like a homeless hawk, I found rest and peace
On the stern cliffs of your face.
Yet if I were to meet you,
See all your Vulcan perfection,
How could I look into those eyes
And tell what's in my heart?
No words could hope to say exactly
All you are, and have been.
You are worshipped, but will never know.
Always and never apart.



Sheryl Peterson



HANGOVER



by

Joyce Devlin

After only three days of his shore leave Captain James T. Kirk stepped slowly down from the transporter platform, and for once he was pleased that his First Officer, Spock, was not there to meet him.

The ship's Chief Security Officer was at his usual place beside the Transporter Chief, waiting to check for any contraband goods. On seeing Kirk stagger, both men moved to help their Captain.

"Captain?" the Security Chief questioned.

"It's all right, Chief, I just felt dizzy for a moment," said Kirk, adding, "You'd better send a couple of your men to bring Scotty back; he's been drinking fairly steadily."

"Shall I inform Mr. Spock you are back, sir?"

"No - and I can manage to get to my quarters myself, thank you." Kirk shrugged off the implied offer of help.

The following morning Kirk awoke with the hangover he had anticipated, but never in his wildest dreams had he expected it to be this bad. His head hurt, he felt terrible; his stomach heaved violently as he rolled off the bed and groped his way to the toilet. After he had been sick he still felt no better. One thing that was becoming clear to him was that he would not get through the morning without a couple of McCoy's wonder pills.

He flipped on the intercom. "Kirk to Sickbay," he said.

"Sickbay, McCoy," came the reply.

"Bones, can you come to my quarters, and bring your little black bag with you?"

"Sure. On my way, Jim," McCoy replied. His mind was racing, as it was not like the Captain to ask for a 'house call'. McCoy had been so surprised by the request he had forgotten to ask what seemed to be the problem, but that became apparent when he entered the room, a little breathless from hurrying.

"Boy, this place smells like a brewery!" he commented.

"And I've got one topper of a hangover," Kirk informed him.

"How long have you been back aboard, Jim?"

"Around five hours." The Captain's speech was slow.

"It's not a hangover," McCoy informed him.

"Then..."

"Look, it can take anything up to forty hours for the alcohol to work its way out of the system. All your body is doing is getting rid of the excess it can't cope with."

"I see."

"Tell me, who were you drinking with?" McCoy asked as he helped Kirk back into bed.

"Scotty. I challenged him to a drinking match," Kirk said sheepishly.

"What on earth possessed you to do such a thing?"

"I can't remember."

"And I suppose you don't remember getting back aboard?"

"No. Did Spock bring me back?"

"No. Spock will be as surprised as I am that you're back," McCoy pressed his hypo to Kirk's shoulder. For once the Captain did not protest.

"Right, that should help shift the alcohol quite quickly, settle your stomach and help you to sleep for a few hours."

"But I'm on duty," Kirk protested. He tried to get up, but McCoy put a hand on his shoulder and firmly forced him back down on the bed.

"There'll be no duty watches for you for another twenty-four hours. You're still officially on leave, remember, so settle down and I'll look in on you in a few hours. Now try and sleep. And Jim..." Kirk looked up. "That's an order."

There was only one person on the Enterprise with the authority to order the Captain about, and that was McCoy the C.M.O. Resigned to the fact, Kirk settled down.

Twenty-four hours later McCoy finally let Kirk get up. His headache had gone, but the pain in his stomach was still there. It had moved slowly down into his right side. He dismissed it as trivial with the thought, *McCoy would have said if there was anything to worry about.*

Slowly he dressed in his uniform; still shaky, he took the two pills McCoy had left for him and headed for the Bridge - it was about time he relieved Spock.

Spock sat quietly in the Captain's seat, going over the Security report. Nothing out of the ordinary had happened, apart from the Captain's behaviour, that was; but he had come to know Jim Kirk well enough over the past few years to understand the motive behind the action. Also, McCoy had confided in him.

Spock turned as the turbolift doors opened, depositing the Captain on the Bridge.

"Status report, Mr. Spock?" Kirk enquired; it was the only thing he could think of saying.

"All quiet, Captain." Spock eyed Kirk's drawn face carefully as he vacated the command chair for him.

Kirk sat down slowly; his stomach had started to turn itself inside out once again. His right hand rubbed his side.

"Are you all right, Captain?" Spock asked, noticing the movement.

"Yes, just a hangover," Kirk muttered still sheepish about it.

"It is illogical to allow oneself to get into that condition."

"Reproof noted and understood," Kirk smiled as he took the clipboard Spock handed him.

For a week now the Enterprise had been star mapping. All was quiet, so Kirk decided to use the time to do some much neglected hand-to-hand workouts. Kirk headed for the gym. He had agreed to meet Spock there, and he knew that the Vulcan would be, as always, ready and waiting.

Kirk changed out of his uniform into his judo suit and tied the black belt around his waist. He knew that the workout would do him the power of good; if only he felt better. The pain in his side was back again - he knew he should have mentioned it to McCoy. He resolved his inward debate and decided he'd mention it after the workout, or suffer the lash of his tongue.

Kirk and Spock started their warm-up routine; that was the only part of the workout Kirk hated, but he knew how important it was. Once complete, both men took up their positions in the centre of the judo mat, bowed formally to each other, and began.

Spock was surprised when he managed to throw Kirk with the most common throw possible, a shoulder throw. Kirk landed heavily, forgetting all about slapping the mat to break his fall. Spock offered his hand to pull him to his feet.

"That was dumb of me," Kirk managed to say once he had his breath back.

"You are not concentrating, Jim."

"Yes, well, let's start again, shall we?" Kirk succeeded in hiding his pain from the Vulcan.

The workout continued with Spock getting the better of his Captain each time; with the obvious lack of concentration on Kirk's part, it was easy. Spock refrained from any automatic moves, keeping his movements controlled and predictable. He had no wish to injure Jim, yet on a normal day when he was concentrating and relaxed there was no need for Spock to contain himself to the degree he had been doing.

Timing his move to the second Spock swung round, fully expecting Kirk to block the kick that followed the manoeuvre; instead the Vulcan's foot landed in Kirk's guts, sending him to the floor doubled up in agonising pain. Spock stood frozen to the spot, unable to move.

"Medical alert! Doctor McCoy to the main gym!" the P.T. instructor shouted into the intercom on his desk. He had been sitting by the view window watching his two senior officers work out. It was his job to be on hand for instruction if his advice was necessary. He had seen the kick coming, and had known instinctively that the Captain had been unprepared.

Spock knelt beside Jim. It was clear even from the unconscious face that he was in agony.

"All right, Spock." McCoy took the situation in at once. He quickly ran the medical scanner over Kirk's body. "Bring that stretcher over here quickly!" he yelled at the two techs who were hovering in the background.

"Doctor?" Spock had just barely pulled himself together.

"Ruptured appendix, Spock," McCoy responded as he helped lift Kirk onto the medical trolley.

Spock paced the waiting room floor several times a minute. Kirk had been in surgery for almost an hour. The removal of the appendix was simple enough, but Spock knew McCoy had to make sure he removed all of the poison from Kirk's body.

"You'll wear a hole in that floor, Spock," McCoy said from the doorway.

"Is the Captain all right?"

"He won't be when I've finished with him," McCoy retorted; then, seeing the Vulcan's puzzled look, he enlightened him.

"Jim must have been experiencing a great deal of discomfort for some time - what with the amount of gunge and the size of the appendix, I'd say about five days. He'll be fine, but I'm keeping our delightful Captain in Sickbay for a whole week."

"I'm sure he will enjoy that," Spock replied as Christine Chapel came through the door.

"Doctor McCoy, the Captain's coming out of the anaesthetic."

"Thank you, Christine."

McCoy and Spock stood side by side as Kirk regained consciousness. He squinted as the room wavered into focus.

"Welcome back, Jim." McCoy spoke first, noting the readings on the panel above the bed. "How do you feel?"

"Terrible," Kirk replied as he focused in on Spock. "That's some kick you've got."

"It wasn't Spock's fault you landed in here with a ruptured

appendix, Jim, it was your own."

Kirk went to protest, but McCoy silenced him and continued,

"You must have known that something wasn't quite right. An appendix doesn't get to that size overnight without giving some indication by way of pain or discomfort - and don't deny it."

"I wasn't about to. Yes, I *had* some discomfort, but nothing to write home about; and before you say anything else, I put it down to constipation, as I hadn't 'been' in days."

"Who's the doctor around here?"

"You are. Why?"

"In future, Jim, let *me* be the judge," McCoy informed him; then he played his ace. "Oh, by the way, you'll be bedded down here for a week to ten days."

"You are joking," Kirk said as he tried to sit up, but Spock's hand restrained him.

"I'm not, Jim; just be thankful you're alive. And Jim... you know darn fine that constipation is no joke, so don't let it go more than two days in future."



JIM, WHY?

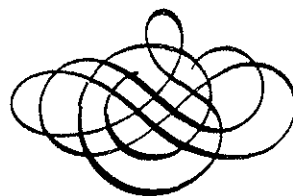


Jim, why
do you do
to me
what you do?
I wish I
knew.
Why do I
feel this
way
I do
for you?
I wish I
knew.
Why? This
feeling
is
so Human
I
ask myself,
"Am I
Vulcan or Human?"

The WORLD of the PROMISE

by

Uicki Richards



"Excellent, Doctor - the white corpuscle count is back to normal."

Nurse Christine Chapel gave her best efficient Head Nurse smile, knowing full well that it wasn't fooling anyone, then did her utmost to get out of the room before her composure really did crumble into little pieces. Not that it actually mattered - what *did* matter was that Dr. McCoy was going to be okay.

In her heart of hearts she had believed he was going to die.

Jim Kirk watched her go, not saying anything - knowing that she'd prefer to deal with her feelings on her own, in her own way. He had a damned good idea of what she was experiencing - none of them had expected McCoy to survive the illness. And Chapel had worked alongside McCoy all the time, while they had tried and fought to unravel the lost Fabrini secrets brought back from the spaceship-world of Yonada.

Not surprising then that Chris felt she had to get out - until those last few moments in sickbay, not one of them had dared to believe that a cure for the fatal xenopolycythemia had truly been found.

But it had been - and McCoy would live to know that he had been instrumental in wiping out one of the last few incurable diseases left to scourge the galaxy.

And perhaps more important to them personally - the Enterprise would not lose its Chief Medical Officer - and Kirk and Spock would not lose their old friend.

McCoy, still slightly groggy, struggled to sit up - fiercely ignoring Kirk's frown and Spock's disapproving look. Although it would be a while before he felt completely fit, still he was feeling well enough to let these two know that they could stop trying to boss him about - even if they did think it was for his own good.

"Well - about time I got back to work," he said, his expression daring them to try and make him change his mind.

The other two looked at each other, and Spock's eyebrows gave such a good impression of a hopelessly resigned shrug that Kirk almost laughed out loud.

"I hadn't noticed that you'd stopped," Kirk said gently. "But Bones, please - take it easy. If it were Spock or I who was ill you wouldn't let us out of here for a week. And don't forget - you've an appointment with a certain lady in three hundred and ninety days' time. I don't want to have to be the one to tell her that you can't come because you've worn yourself out!"

McCoy stopped halfway off the couch, his defiant expression vanishing. Kirk was instantly sorry for his words, even if his only intention had been to make McCoy slow down a little until his strength returned. Instead, all he'd done was make McCoy think about things he'd been trying to push to the back of his mind for a while - his brush with death - and Natira.

A moment had been bound to come when it would all crowd in on McCoy - Kirk

cursed himself for not being ready for it. He'd been expecting it - but not quite this soon. Bones had been very weak, and they didn't want his recovery to be hampered by emotional regrets and depression. That was the trouble when the Doctor got sick - *he* was the expert, not them. And asking M'Benga or Christine to talk to him professionally would be asking for an explosion - McCoy was just about the worst patient on the ship, no matter what he said about Kirk and Spock. And Kirk himself just didn't know what to say to him for the best - not this time. He had never seen McCoy this deeply affected before - and he could imagine how he felt. Kirk, too, knew what it was to lose someone and to have to return to the Enterprise, beloved as *she* was. It had happened to him more than once.

Spock, too, understood - although McCoy had once said he would never know what it meant to love; would never know the 'desperate chances'; Spock could remember all too well the passions that had raged in Sarpeidon's ice age - he had not forgotten Zarabeth. Or the choice *he* had had to make.

The Vulcan stepped forward and quietly helped McCoy to get up from the couch; his silent support the only way he could let the Doctor know that he had his sympathy. As he had done on Yonada, when Kirk had just told him of McCoy's condition.

This time, as before, McCoy knew what Spock meant. But now he didn't react with quite such a show of gruffness. He steadied himself, nodded briefly.

"Thanks, Spock," he said.

Then he walked smartly from sickbay, leaving the other two suspecting that he'd had to go - before he did break down.

"I'm glad you did that, Spock," Kirk said thoughtfully. "And I think I just might go and visit Bones' cabin later - with a bottle of something."

Spock gave him a noncommittal look. "It seems to be a way Humans have when recovering from trauma."

Kirk smiled wryly, knowing that Spock signified agreement by that remark - although it wouldn't do for him. "I'll see you later," he said, and made to leave.

But Spock stopped him. "Jim - McCoy *will* be all right." It was a statement.

Kirk shrugged worriedly. "Yes - he will. But for how long? I just hope that by the time we get to see the Fabrini arriving at their new world, McCoy has *really* got over it."

"Jim," said Spock, "I know I do not qualify as an expert in Human emotions and traumas - but I believe you will find that McCoy is, in some ways, tougher than you think. He *will* overcome this."

"Well," replied Kirk, "I hope you're right."

Not much more than a standard Terran year later, the Enterprise was on course for a rendezvous with Yonada, leading a fleet of Federation support ships who would help the people of the Fabrini to settle on their new world.

The long-dead ancestors who had built Yonada must have possessed great foresight, if not a touch of clairvoyance, Kirk mused as he sat in the command chair, waiting for the moment when the image of Yonada would flash onto the main viewscreen. The final destination of the Fabrini was a Class M planet in the outer region of the Milky Way, just out of its ice age (when reckoned on the calendar of a world's

evolution) which had been earmarked for Federation colonisation at some future date. But when the Enterprise's report of their contact with Yonada had gone in, and Spock's findings had confirmed that the planet was indeed the wandering asteroid-spaceship's disembarkation point, the UFP had decided in its wisdom to allow the Fabrini to settle there and to give aid if required. Naturally, the UFP hierarchy could see the possibility of that ancient people becoming valued members of the Federation.

And such a request had been received. Two months after the Enterprise had left Yonada, the Fabrini had broadcast a subspace message asking for UFP aid at disembarkation - the 'Book of the People' really had contained, if not all the information the Fabrini would need, then a very great part of it. Kirk wondered at that isolated people finally managing to accept what their 'world' was, to the extent of sending a radio message to the outside galaxy.

The turbolift doors swooshed open, and McCoy came in to stand silently behind Kirk's chair. Spock, too, left his library computer station, and took up his customary position at Kirk's other shoulder. Kirk didn't allow himself to turn and observe McCoy's face. On the surface McCoy had totally recovered from his ordeal on Yonada - but Kirk still worried what his reaction would be when he met Natira again. And he still didn't want to encounter the haunted look in McCoy's eyes which he had worn in unguarded moments for months after the Enterprise had left Natira's world.

"Yonada within range now, Captain," reported Sulu. "Coming up on screen in a few moments"

And then it was there. The ten-thousand-year-old spacecraft masquerading as a world appeared, looking exactly the same as when they had left it, shining against a velvet black background speckled with a few twinkling stars. Waiting for the end of its long journey; and for them.

"Well, gentlemen," said Kirk. "I think it's time for us to pay our new friends a visit."

They were taken in formal procession to the Oracle Room. There Natira greeted them with all the dignity of the leader of a great people. She seemed to have grown in bearing and stature since they had seen her last, and Kirk was impressed; her mien was perfect for the occasion - even if she did allow herself an extra smile when she greeted McCoy. But she could be forgiven for that.

The Oracle itself, once so tyrannical, was silent now, though still functional. The three Enterprise officers eyed it warily, and Natira laughed. Then she led them out and into a large chamber, to begin a welcoming banquet, and to tell them of her hopes for the new world and of the aid she required for her people.

The help she requested included transportation to the planet's surface on arrival; due to the Oracle's having malfunctioned as it did, not only had Yonada been sent off course, but the original schedule of the Fabrini ancestors had been disrupted. The Book of the People should have been opened to them several years previously, to give them time to learn how to operate the small spacecraft concealed within the fabric of Yonada for so many centuries, intended for just such a purpose by their ancestors. But using them now was out of the question; they had hardly had time to adjust to the

truths about themselves, their world and the universe itself, let alone learn to use the advanced technology of short-haul space transport. So the UFP's aid was certainly needed; Natira also requested general help and advice with colonisation - the knowledge in the Book and in the Fabrini intelligence files was extensive, but Natira had become open-minded enough to see the wisdom of using Federation ability and technology to aid her people as well as their own resources.

It was much what Kirk and the UFP had been hoping for - so negotiations with the Fabrini were obviously going to be a lot easier than anyone had expected. Thanks, in the main, to Natira the High Priestess - and perhaps also to their own first contact with the Fabrini. Indeed, without that contact Yonada would no longer exist -- along with the population of Daran V. So in avoiding the collision of the spaceship-asteroid and the planet, they had not only saved two peoples, but had probably also gained the Federation a promising member world.

The banquet finished; the initial serious talking had been got over with a lot sooner than expected. Kirk contacted the Enterprise and gave the order for technical crews and advisers to beam over; Spock left for the beam-down point to begin supervising them. People had begun to wander off out of the main room, back to their own business or just enjoying a day of relaxation; after all, such an occasion as today definitely warranted celebration, by anybody's calendar. Out of the corner of his eyes, Kirk saw McCoy and Natira slipping out of the room together. Well - that was to be expected, Kirk supposed. They'd certainly want time to talk alone. And on the surface, both Bones and the High Priestess of the Fabrini were keeping it light, making it easy. But Kirk still couldn't help but worry about McCoy. He had seen how difficult it had been for the Doctor in those first few months after he had left her.

And Kirk did not want to see McCoy that upset again.

They walked in one of Yonada's gardens - green and beautiful, to the eye it appeared to be just as it looked, an open space under the sky. So cunningly had the designers planned the travelling world, it was not hard to see how the people of Yonada had believed for so long that it truly was a world like any other.

At first they talked of inconsequential things; McCoy's daily life aboard the starship, what Natira had been doing since the three Enterprise officers had left. Then the conversation turned to wider matters; Natira spoke of her great plans for her people, and their new world, as yet unnamed and unseen. McCoy told of the Federation worlds, of life in the outside galaxy, and of the principles and ideals they tried to uphold. They talked as old friends, yet both knew that they had been more than that to each other, if only for a brief space of time. But neither seemed to be able to speak of that; at least not for what seemed like hours.

"McCoy - I have a favour to ask of you," Natira said at length.

"Anything in my power to give," he replied, meaning it - yet with an undertone that said, gently, *Please don't ask me for that which I cannot.*

"It is not for myself, but for my people," she smiled. "Once, to ask this would have seemed like sacrilege to me..." She paused

for a moment. "The Oracle will go with us to the World of the Promise, and I do not think it right that it should still have the power to punish, not now when its work is all but completed. Now is the time for us to cast aside superstition, and to live in the galaxy as it truly is - but still I would not have us completely throw away *all* the old traditions; for long centuries the Oracle gave my people good advice and showed wisdom of a sort. And the travelling world of Yonada is now also a part of the long history of the Fabrini. Therefore we shall leave Yonada in permanent orbit around our new home, with your people's help - and the Oracle shall be moved and taken with us. So the Instrument of Obedience must be removed from everyone, in order that the Oracle should no longer rule us. Advise us when we ask, yes. But not rule us. Now is the time when we must stand on our own and begin to grow. Will you do this for us, McCoy?"

McCoy nodded, his eyes bright with emotion. "No sooner said than done," he said gruffly, then, "Natira - you have already grown much."

She looked at him, eyes also bright, and nodded in understanding. Then she took his hand and led him to a small stonelike seat by an artificially natural-looking pond. They had to talk - both knew it.

"Perhaps we have both grown - both changed," she said at length. "People do - perhaps they are meant to. Even if the essential core does not change, experience does teach us much, and we move on. This I have learned these last months, if I did not know it before. I still miss you, McCoy - but I know things could not be any other way, whether I like it or not. We both have our destinies, and they are separate. And to deny what we must do would be wrong. I belong to my people, and you belong to the stars."

McCoy was silent for a moment before he spoke. "You put it very well," he finally replied, and smiled regretfully. "You know I would have stayed had things been different."

"I would rather have it this way, McCoy - you are well, and shall live."

"I hadn't really meant my illness, Natira - I had meant, if my life was different."

"You must stay with your ship - I *do* understand. I have told you."

"Yes - and after all, we do get leave sometimes, y'know. I could come and visit."

"Yes - but you must realise that as High Priestess of Yonada I must soon select a mate so that the line will continue." Natira sounded as if she didn't much like what she was saying.

"I hadn't thought of that - but I suppose I should have guessed." McCoy sounded thoughtful. "But Natira - don't do anything you might regret forever. I know you and I cannot really be - that you must choose another one day. But do it to be happy - you deserve it."

"I must think of my people."

"And also of yourself - if you're miserable, because you've chosen the wrong man, for however noble a reason, then you won't

function well enough to do your best for your people. You said it was time for your people to stand on their own, to grow. That means learning to think in different ways. So why can't you apply it to yourself, too? Don't be too hard on yourself, Natira - there's no need."

When she turned to face him, it looked as if a great weight had been lifted from her. "McCoy - I will. Thank you. You do not know what you have done for me. I had been too blind in my sense of duty to see - but you have made me realise that perhaps there is a way I can live without too much sacrifice. I have had little freedom or time for myself since childhood - always I was being trained to be the High Priestess. Always the people must come first. But perhaps - perhaps you are right. I will think on this, and try and find a way. Helping my people to settle on the World of the Promise will be a lifetime's work, and I accept it gladly - but perhaps there *will* also be a life of my own."

"Good, Natira - it'll make it easier for me to leave, knowing you're going to be okay," said McCoy. But his face was clouded.

"McCoy - what of you? Will *you* be happy?"

"I have good friends, and my life on the Enterprise," he replied, his mood lifting a little. "Yes - I will be, in my own way. I won't forget you, Natira, or the time I spent with you, and there will always be one or two regrets, but like you said, we must move on. The Enterprise is my life, and we both know it has to be this way.

"Yes," she said, smiling again. "It is our destiny - you serve in your world, and I in mine. This is how it must be. But as you said, you will be able to visit our new world from time to time - and we still have these days together while you are here to help us move to our long-awaited new home."

McCoy nodded, and they both stood and began to walk together back toward the room where McCoy had left Kirk and Spock. As they walked out of the artificial (yet beautiful) parkland, each knew that it was unnecessary now to say much which had been left unsaid. Both knew that they could have been much to each other, had life not made it impossible for them. But for what they had had, they were grateful. And neither would let it spoil their separate lives.

Kirk was still in the main room, talking to Fabrini officials of one kind or another, and to Spock, who had returned after setting the technical advisers about their work. Both saw McCoy and Natira re-enter, arm in arm.

"Well, " said McCoy cheerfully, "I thought we'd come here to do some work - not party," he added as he poured himself a drink. "I don't know about you two, but I've got work to do!" he added as he walked off out of the room again, still grinning, carrying his drink with him.

Kirk frowned, puzzled. McCoy seemed more like his old self that he'd truly seen him in a long time. He looked at Natira, who was still smiling in the direction where McCoy had disappeared, then at Spock, who didn't look in the least bit puzzled.

"I told you he'd be all right," said Spock. And poured *himself* a drink.

LOSS

I've never touched your hand
Or walked beside you.
Your eyes have never
Looked upon my face.
Our minds have touched
But in the way of starlight,
In anonymity
Formless as space.

I look up at the stars
And bid them seek you,
To bear you back to me
Safe from all pain.
But the message they blink back
Is past my knowing.
Oh my Vulcan,
Will we e'er be one again?



Sheryl Peterson

alien

I was lost
And it seemed in all of space
Only I followed no orbit.
I was lonely
Though a million bright-eyed stars
Winked back at me.
I was empty
As the void of space itself,
Not understanding
Like a child
Wooed by a skylark
With a love that could not be.

You were there
Like some wraith I'd conjured up
In some strange instinctive magic.
You were strong
Like a shield you sheltered me
When I reeled under life's blows.
You're beside me
To guide me always
If I lose my way and falter.
Side by side
Like two small spacecraft
'cross the galaxy unknown.



Sheryl Peterson

